MARVEL

BLACK PANTHER

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BLACK PANTHER

THE BRIDE

PREVIOUSLY

There are some places you just don't mess with. Wakanda is one of them. Since the dawn of time, that African warrior nation has been sending would-be conquerors home in body bags. While the rest of Africa got carved up like a Christmas turkey by the rest of the world, Wakanda's cultural evolution has gone unchecked for centuries, unfettered by the yoke of colonization. The result: A hi-tech, resource-rich, ecologically-sound paradise that makes the rest of the world seem primitive by comparison.

Ruling over all this is the Black Panther.

The Black Panther is more than just the embodiment of a warrior cult that's served as Wakanda's religious, political and military head since its inception. The Black Panther is the embodiment of the ideals of a people. Anyone who'd dare to make a move on Wakanda must go through him.

Every kingdom must have its Queen, and T'Challa's mother has decided it is time for him to choose a wife. After battling potential suitors and mounting a rescue effort in New Orleans with the New Avengers' Luke Cage, T'Challa returns to his quest for a bride. His decision has been made. Who will it be?

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Bride of the Panther
Part One

THIS TIME, I FLY ALONE.

AS A KING, IT'S HARD TO HAVE A MOMENT ALONE. YOU'RE LEADING A COUNTRY, COMMANDING AN ARMY, WITH ALL THE SERVANTS AND COUNCILS AND SECURITY GUARDS AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO COME WITH IT.

AND EVEN WHILE CONSTANTLY SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE, IT'S EASY TO FEEL LONELY. NO ONE TO TRUST, OR EVEN EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR POSITION.

WAKANDA. TEN YEARS AGO.

T'CHALLA, WHO DO YOU THINK WILL BE KING ONE DAY?

ODD QUESTION, T'SHAN.

YOU KNOW MY FATHER WAS KING. I AM THE NEXT IN LINE.

TRUE. BUT NOW THAT MY FATHER IS REGENT, WHAT IF THE KINGSHIP PASSED TO ME? WOULDN'T THAT BE NATURAL?

WOULD YOU SUPPORT ME IF I WERE MADE KING?

YOU SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ON SCHEMING INSTEAD OF PRACTICING YOUR FIGHTING SKILLS, T'SHAN.

YOU WILL NEVER BE KING!

THE LAST TIME I WAS THIS ALONE, I WAS TRAVELING IN THIS SAME DIRECTION ON MY WALKABOUT.

I WAS EXCITED BY THE PROSPECT. A CHANCE TO TEST MY SURVIVAL SKILLS. AND A CHANCE TO BE MY OWN MAN, UNBURDENED BY TITLE OR EXPECTATION.

AND PERHAPS, A CHANCE TO MAKE A *TRUE* FRIEND.

BUT OF ALL THINGS I SAW ON MY JOURNEY...

...NOTHING CAN COMPARE TO THE FIRST SIGHT OF HER.

IF THIS JOURNEY GOES WELL, I WILL NEVER BE ALONE AGAIN.

A PROSPECT THAT THRILLS AND TERRIFIES ME.

A WISE WOMAN ONCE SAID: "THERE IS NO GREATER CHALLENGE TO A WARRIOR THAN TO OPEN HIS HEART TO LOVE."

WHY IS MY MOTHER ALWAYS RIGHT?

THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT MOTHER WIT, YOUR HIGHNESS!

NEW YORK. TWO DAYS AGO.

I TOLD YOU, LUKE. CALL ME T'CHALLA.

NOPE. I'M DOWN WITH THE KING. I'M GONNA REMIND MYSELF OF THAT ON A REGULAR BASIS.

I APPRECIATE THE RIDE BACK TO NEW YORK. HOPE I'M NOT TAKING YOU TOO FAR OUT OF YOUR WAY.

AFRICA? WHO'S IN--

ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT *STORM?*

IT'S THE LEAST I COULD DO FOR YOUR TROUBLES. AND I WAS HEADING TO NEW YORK ANYWAY.

BIZ AT THE U.N.? THE STOCK MARKET? OR STARK TOWER?

HOME.

HEY, MAN, WHATEVER FLOATS YOUR BOAT, IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS. NEVER SPEAK ON ANOTHER MAN'S WOMAN, THAT'S WHAT I SAY...

YOU HAVE "*BEEF*" WITH STORM?

"*BEEF*"? NOPE. NOT AT ALL.

BUT YOU HAD A VERY STRONG REACTION TO ME GOING TO SEE HER.

LOOK, MAN, I AIN'T TRYING TO SPEAK ILL OF HER, ESPECIALLY IF SHE'S "***THE ONE***"...BUT SHE ALWAYS SEEMS STUCK-UP TO ME. AND I DON'T EVEN THINK SHE DATES BROTHERS.

YOU KNOW HOW AFRICANS--EXCEPT YOURSELF, OF COURSE--CAN BE TOWARDS AFRICAN-***AMERICANS***. SNOOTY. ARROGANT.

YOU HIT ON HER AND SHE TURNED YOU DOWN, RIGHT?

YEAH -- BUT THAT'S ***NOT*** THE POINT!

HOW MUCH DO YOU ***REALLY*** KNOW ABOUT HER?

BREAK IT DOWN FOR ME, PLEASE! HELP A BROTHER UNDERSTAND...

WELL, YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED TO HEAR IT ALL STARTED...

"...WITH MALCOLM X."

"MALCOLM'S RECENT TRIP TO MECCA HAD EXPANDED HIS THINKING BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE, INTO A MORE ***INTERNATIONAL*** MINDSET. HE'D BROKEN WITH THE NATION OF ISLAM, AND WAS TRAVELING TO AFRICA TO MEET WITH SEVERAL HEADS OF STATE.

"HE HAD SEVERAL AIDES WITH HIM. AMONG THEM WAS ***MISS HARRIET MUNROE,*** WHO BROUGHT HER YOUNG SON ***DAVID*** WITH HER.

"HE MET WITH SEVERAL IMPORTANT LEADERS, INCLUDING MY ***FATHER,*** T'CHAKA.

"MALCOLM EVENTUALLY RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES, WHERE HE WAS ASSASSINATED BY MEMBERS OF THE SECT HE ONCE LED.

"DAVID FELL IN LOVE WITH AFRICA ON THAT CHILDHOOD TRIP AND NEVER GOT OVER IT. SO, AS A YOUNG MAN, HE DECIDED TO ATTEND THE UNIVERSITY OF KENYA.

"THAT'S WHERE HE MET ***N'DARE.*** SHE WAS ALSO A STUDENT AT THE SCHOOL, BUT SHE WAS MORE THAN THAT. SHE WAS A KENYAN ***PRINCESS.***

"THEY MARRIED AND HAD A BEAUTIFUL CHILD."

ORORO? REALLY? IT WAS LIKE THAT? WITH MALCOLM AND YOUR DAD?

OKAY, THIS IS DEEP.

SO HOW DID YOU GUYS MEET? ARRANGED BY THE FAMILIES?

HARDLY. WHEN I MET HER, SHE WAS A PICKPOCKET IN THE AFRICAN OUTBACK.

NO! HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

"HER PARENTS WERE KILLED IN A DISASTER THAT ALMOST TOOK HER LIFE. SHE WAS TAKEN IN BY A GANG OF THIEVES THAT TAUGHT HER HOW TO STEAL TO SURVIVE.

"ONCE SHE DISCOVERED HER GIFTS, SHE BECAME A GODDESS FIGURE FOR A GROUP OF DESERT NOMADS, BRINGING RAIN AND LIFE TO BARREN AREAS.

"THEN SHE WAS RECRUITED BY XAVIER TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE X-MEN."

HOLD ON. THERE'S A LOT OF THINGS THAT DON'T MAKE SENSE. IF SHE WAS ***ROYALTY***, HOW COME HER FAMILY DIDN'T COME ***LOOKING*** FOR HER? AND IF YOU MET THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE, HOW DID YOU GUYS LOSE TOUCH?

ALL GOOD QUESTIONS THAT LEAD TO VERY INTERESTING STORIES...

...HOWEVER, WE HAVE ARRIVED AT YOUR HOME.

YOU'RE KIDDING ME, RIGHT? YOU ***GOTTA*** FINISH THE STORY.

ANOTHER TIME, PERHAPS. I HEAR YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES CALLING.

LUKE? IS THAT YOU, HONEY? I HOPE SO BECAUSE WE NEED A DIAPER RUN REAL BAD!

SEE, YOU THINK THIS IS FUNNY NOW, BUT BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR, BIG TYMER.

I WISH FOR NOTHING BUT CONTINUED HAPPINESS FOR YOU. GOODBYE, MY FRIEND.

THERE'S MY BIG GIRL!

OHMYGOD, LUKE. WAS THAT... THE BLACK PANTHER?

YES IT WAS...

OH MAN... I GOTTA COMB MY HAIR BEFORE I GO OUTSIDE.

I HATE BEING IN THIS SITUATION.

THIS IS GOING TO BE VERY PAINFUL. WHY SHOULD I ENDURE A MINUTE OF PAIN? I AM A WARRIOR, BUT WHY CHOOSE A FIGHT WHEN YOU CAN WALK AWAY?

I'VE FLOWN OVER THOUSANDS OF HOUSES IN MY JOURNEY HERE.

THERE IS A WOMAN IN EACH OF THOSE HOUSES.

WITH ALL THOSE WOMEN TO CHOOSE FROM, WHY AM I DOING ALL THIS FOR HER?

SON, ROMANTIC LOVE IS A GREAT LUXURY. SO MANY PEOPLE STAY IN UNHAPPY RELATIONSHIPS FOR THEIR CHILDREN, BECAUSE THEY CAN'T AFFORD TO LIVE ON THEIR OWN. EVEN WEALTHEY PEOPLE MARRY TO JOIN FORTUNES OR EMPIRES.

FATHER, ARE YOU SAYING THAT ROMANTIC LOVE IS NOT ACHIEVABLE?

JUST THE ***OPPOSITE.*** ROMANTIC LOVE IS THE ***HIGHEST IDEAL.*** THE FAMILY IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE NATION. WITHOUT LOVE IN YOUR HEART, THE WEIGHT OF RESPONSIBILITY WILL CRUSH YOU, TURN YOU INTO A TYRANT.

I LOVE YOUR MOTHER. ALWAYS HAVE.

YES, SHE IS FROM A FAMILY FULL OF INTELLIGENT, STRONG, GOOD-LOOKING PEOPLE, MAKING HER GENETICALLY APPEALING AS A MOTHER OF MY CHILDREN...BUT ALL OF THAT WOULD MEAN ***NOTHING*** IF SHE WEREN'T A WOMAN WHOSE PRESENCE STILL INTOXICATES ME YEARS AFTER WE FIRST MET.

WHAT'S WRONG? DOES IT ALL SEEM LIKE AN IMPOSSIBLE GOAL?

SOMEWHAT, YES.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, SON. YOU'VE GOT YEARS OF FUN AHEAD OF YOU. ENJOY THE LIFE OF A YOUNG PRINCE TO THE FULLEST. BECAUSE WHEN YOU MEET ***THE ONE***, YOU DON'T WANT TO EVER LOOK BACK.

AND THAT WAS THE PROBLEM. I MET THE ONE. BUT I WAS JUST A BOY ON MY JOURNEY TO MANHOOD.

ONCE WE MET, THE ATTRACTION WAS INSTANT, UNDENIABLE, ALL-CONSUMING.

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL. SMART. TOUGH. COURAGEOUS. PRINCIPLED, EVEN WHILE BEING A THIEF.

ONCE WE MET, WE WERE PRETTY MUCH INSEPARABLE. WE HAD MANY ADVENTURES TOGETHER.*

*SEE STORM--IN STORES NOW! -EDITOR

ONLY ONE THING COULD COME BETWEEN US.

WHAT'S WRONG?

KLAAAAAAAAAW!

T'CHALLA! WHAT--

T'CHALLA? IT'S ME.

TOOK ALL AFTERNOON FOR ME TO FIND YOU. AND I THOUGHT *I* COULD MOVE FAST.

DON'T WORRY, HONEY. TOMORROW WE WILL SEARCH FOR HIM AGAIN AND KEEP LOOKING UNTIL WE FIND HIM... OR MAYBE DECIDE THAT WASN'T HIM AFTER ALL.

I'VE BEEN A FOOL.

AND THAT'S ALL I AM? A *DISTRACTION?*

DON'T MAKE THIS ANY HARDER THAN IT IS, ORORO!

HARD? WHAT DO *YOU* KNOW ABOUT HARD? SPOILED LITTLE RICH BOY. EVERYBODY HURTS.

I HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES. AND INSTEAD OF FULFILLING MY COMMITMENTS I'VE BEEN ON VACATION. MEANWHILE THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER STILL WALKS THE EARTH.

I NEED TO GET MY MIND FOCUSED ON THE TASK AT HAND AND TO DO THAT I CAN'T AFFORD ANY DISTRACTIONS.

THE SUDAN, TODAY.

THEY'LL FETCH A PRETTY PRICE ON THE MARKET...

UNTIL THEN, WELL, THEY ARE USED TO BEING SLAVES...

NO! PLEASE!

UH...IS IT ME...OR IS IT GETTING DARK?

...RAIN... PLEASE LET THE LEGEND BE TRUE...

....OH NO....

IT'S HER!

FOOL! DON'T POINT YOUR GUN IN THE AIR!

ALLAH, LET YOUR SERVANT MAKE IT TO THE JEEP IN TIME TO OUTRUN THE STORM...

PFOOH!

FIRST THE RAIN, NOW THE WIND?

THE SAND... CUTTING ME TO SHREDS!

IF YOU THINK THE SAND IS BAD--

SNIKT

--HOW ABOUT THIS?

SHUCK

THANK YOU, GODDESS. THANK YOU.

A GODDESS WHO PICKS LOCKS? HARDLY.

YOUR HUMILITY CANNOT HIDE YOUR DIVINITY.

WHY DID YOU GIVE HIM THE QUICK WAY OUT?

COULDN'T HELP IT. I HAD TO TAKE ONE OUT MYSELF.

IT TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH TO CATCH UP TO ME, LOGAN.

LONG ENOUGH TO SEE YOU'VE BEEN MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME. LAKES IN THE DESERT. ARAB SLAVE TRADE BROKEN UP PRETTY BAD. NICE WORK.

THANK YOU.

AND WHAT DO *YOU* WANT?

DOING THIS MUCH GOOD CAN LEAD TO AN EQUAL AND OPPOSITE REACTION. I'M OUT HERE TO WATCH YOUR BACK.

I BET YOU ARE.

AAAH, NICE TO KNOW DIVINITY HAS IMPROVED YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR.

YOUR BOYFRIEND'S HERE.

MMMM, THE TROLL IS HERE.

EXCUSE ME... WOULD YOU LIKE SOME FRESH WATER?

FIRST THE GODDESS, NOW THE PANTHER GOD! WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO BE FAVORED LIKE THIS?

YOU HONOR US WITH YOUR STRENGTH.

CLASSY GUY, YOUR BOYFRIEND.

YOU *KNOW* HE IS NOT MY--

UH HUH.

HOLA, T'CHALLA.

HELLO, LOGAN.

OKAAAAY, GOT IT. WHY DON'T YOU GUYS HAVE YOUR MOMENT...

DO YOU NEED A RIDE, LOGAN?

NO, I'M COOL. THANKS.

SO, YOU *FOUND* ME.

YOU DIDN'T MAKE IT HARD. ALL I HAD TO DO WAS FOLLOW THE PATH OF FRIED SLAVERS AND NEWLY MADE LAKES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT.

I USED TO DO THIS ALL THE TIME, YOU KNOW. AFTER YOU *LEFT* ME. I WOULD WANDER THE DESERTS, DISPENSING JUSTICE. THAT'S WHY THEY CALLED ME THE GODDESS.

I NEVER *LEFT* YOU. I HAD AN OBLIGATION TO FULFILL. I KILLED MY FATHER'S MURDERER, AND NOW I AM KING.

OH, I SEE. NOW YOU CAN FIT ME INTO YOUR BUSY SCHEDULE?

NOW I AM THE MAN YOU *DESERVE.*

YOU.... FOOL!

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I NEEDED YOU? YOU LEFT ME ALONE, A CHILD, IN LOVE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

I WAS A CHILD, TOO. CHILDREN MAKE MISTAKES.

I WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING FOR YOU! WE COULD HAVE HAD IT ALL! IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PERFECT!

IT'S *NOT* TOO LATE!

IT *IS!*

YOU SAY YOU WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING FOR ME. THEN DO THIS...

ORORO MUNROE, WILL YOU MARRY ME?

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THE TWO OF YOU HAVE PASSED EVERY TEST. BUT ONLY ONE OF YOU CAN BE CHOSEN FOR THIS GREAT HONOR.

LET THE FINAL TRIAL BEGIN-- *NOW!*

CLANNG!

KLASH

AND SO IT IS *DECIDED!* BRING THE WEAPONS!

WITH THIS *MAGICAL SWORD,* THIS *BLESSED ARMOR,* THIS *FLYING CARPET...* YOU WILL BE THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR AGAINST THE SUPER-POWERED ENEMIES OF OUR FAITH!

INFIDELS *BEWARE!* THE **Arabian Knight** HAS *RETURNED!*

UH, SIR... THERE ALREADY IS AN *ARABIAN KNIGHT* AND HE'S--

IF THE BLACK OPS DIVISION OF THE VATICAN CAN INVENT ITS OWN *BLACK KNIGHT* TO INVADE WAKANDA, THEN WHY CAN'T *WE?*

UHHHHM... GOOD POINT, SIR.

AFRICA IS A HOTLY CONTESTED TERRITORY. ***CHRISTIANS*** TRYING TO CONVERT THE POPULACE FASTER THAN ISLAM. ***CHINA*** MAKING ECONOMIC INROADS. AND, OF COURSE, THE ***AMERICANS,*** SENDING IN TWO OF THEIR AGENTS, WHO APPEAR TO BE NATIONALISTS WHILE SERVING AT THE BEHEST OF THEIR SUPERIORS IN THE WHITE HOUSE -- IT HAS TO BE ***STOPPED!***

BUT NOW, WE HAVE A SYMBOL OF OUR OWN TO TRUMP THOSE. SOMETHING FOR THE CHILDREN TO ASPIRE TO.

BUT WHEN THE VATICAN SENT THEIR *÷AHEM÷* "BLACK KNIGHT" IN TO DEFEAT THE PANTHER, HE WAS--

ARE YOU COMPARING ***OUR*** HOLY WARRIOR TO THAT BUFFOON?

N-N-NO SIR, I WAS JUST--

YOU WERE JUST ABOUT TO ***BLASPHEME!***

I STAND CORRECTED, SIR.

LOCK IN THEIR LOCATION! PREPARE FOR A ***FULL*** ASSAULT!

Bride of the Panther
Part Two

SAY IT AGAIN.

ORORO MUNROE, WILL YOU MARRY ME?

I HEARD YOU THE *FIRST* TIME. I JUST WANTED TO HEAR YOU SAY IT AGAIN.

SO...

I AM SUPPOSED TO WAIT HERE UNTIL MY ARMS FALL OFF?

TARGETS LOCKED. FIRING...

DO YOU *HEAR* SOMETHING?

NO. AND THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

NO... LISTEN....

HM.

YOU *DO* HEAR IT.

THEY ARE STILL A COUPLE OF MILES AWAY, BUT APPROACHING FAST.

QUICK ANSWER BEFORE THIS STARTS?

NOT THAT!

WE NEED TO *TALK.*

NO...I MEAN...JUST HOLD ON A MINUTE.

BY THE WAY, DID YOU HEAR IT OR "*FEEL*" IT?

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.

FEEL...THE CURRENTS SHIFTED UNNATURALLY.

SO SMUG!

TARGETS MOVING. FIRE NOW!

WHOA--?! WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

DID YOU READ THE FILE?

EVADE! EVADE!

I CAN'T. IT KEEPS GROWING!

KA-BOOM!

YOU WERE SAYING...?

I WAS SAYING--

DIE, *INFIDELS!* DIE BY THE SWORD OF THE *ARABIAN KNIGHT!*

OH, *WHAT* NOW?

"*ARABIAN KNIGHT*"? THAT'S NOT THE--

WHOEVER HE IS, HE'S *ALL YOURS,* YOUR HIGHNESS.

HOLD ON. THIS WON'T TAKE LONG.

I'VE ALREADY WAITED TOO LONG FOR YOU.

WHOOSH

YOU'RE BEING CHILDISH.

SWOOSH

I'M BEING CHILDISH?

DON'T YOU HAVE ANY FORGIVENESS IN YOU?

I SEE.

I SHOULD FEEL SORRY FOR YOU.

YESTERDAY'S SORROWS ARE NOTHING COMPARED TO TOMORROW'S JOY. WE HAVE A LIFETIME OF LOVE AHEAD OF US.

SWOOSH

I HAVE NEVER STOPPED LOVING YOU.

WHAK

WHAK

WHAK

SO, WHEN YOU WERE WITH OTHER WOMEN-- THAT WAS AN EXPRESSION OF YOUR LOVE FOR ME?

ORORO.

A YOUNG MAN LOSES HIS HEAD SOMETIMES.

THUD

I DID WHAT YOUNG MEN *DO*. NOW I AM AN ADULT, READY TO GIVE YOU THE LOVE YOU DESERVE.

THE QUESTION IS:

DO YOU *STILL* LOVE ME?

ZAAAAAAAP

HMMM, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO INTERPRET THAT...

...BUT IF THERE IS THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE THAT WE COULD MAKE IT WORK, THEN LET'S TRY AGAIN.

PLEASE?

WHUMP

TEN MINUTES LATER...

I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE SO HAPPY. I HAVE NOT CONSENTED TO ANYTHING BEYOND SPENDING MORE TIME WITH YOU.

THAT *ALONE* IS ENOUGH TO MAKE ME SMILE.

I KNOW THAT SMUG EXPRESSION. YOU THINK YOU'VE *WON.*

I PRESUME NOTHING. AND NOTHING YOU SAY WILL MAKE ME BICKER WITH YOU.

AUTO-PILOT: ON.

ENGAGED.

DESTINATION: HOME.

ENTERING WAKANDAN AIRSPACE IN 50 MINUTES.

WAKANDAN CENTRAL COMMAND. FIVE MINUTES LATER...

UNUSUAL METEORIC CONDITIONS, SIR.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

T'CHALLA'S SHIP SEEMS TO HAVE ENTERED A FIELD OF FIERCE WEATHER CONDITIONS. STORM CLOUDS, HIGH WINDS... EVEN HAIL.

WHY DOESN'T THE SHIP JUST FLY AROUND IT?

IT APPEARS...

...THEY *ARE* IN THE HEART OF THE STORM.

NAIROBI, KENYA.

SHE HAS RETURNED!

AT FIRST, SHE WAS WITH THE X-MEN. WE THOUGHT THEY WOULD DO THEIR BUSINESS AND GO. BUT NOW THEY HAVE GONE AND SHE HAS STAYED.

THE PATH OF DESTRUCTION IN HER WAKE STRETCHES FROM ONE END OF THE CONTINENT TO THE OTHER. THE SITUATION IS FAR WORSE THAN IT WAS BEFORE. NOW SHE'S IN COMPLETE COMMAND OF HER ABILITIES.

WHERE IS SHE NOW?

SHE WAS LAST SEEN FREEING SLAVES IN THE SUDAN. AND WRECKING AN ENTIRE AIR FORCE WHILE DOING IT.

I WAS TOLD THEY WERE GOING TO SEND SOMEONE AGAINST HER IF SHE SHOWED UP THERE. BUT THE BLACK PANTHER MADE QUICK WORK OF HIM.

DID YOU SAY *BLACK PANTHER?*

Y-Y-YES SIR, HE WAS ON THE SCENE....

THIS IS BIG. *VERY* BIG. WE NEED TO GET READY.

THIS COULD BE *HUMANITY'S LAST STAND!*

IS THAT WAKANDA?

YES.

WELCOME *HOME.*

DON'T WORRY. WE WON'T MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF IT.

IS YOUR *MOTHER* GOING TO BE THERE?

YES, BUT--

WHERE IS A MIRROR? WHAT DOES MY HAIR LOOK LIKE? THIS IS A *DISASTER!*

AND I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF I *LIKE* YOU!

AM I BEING RIDICULOUS?

COMPLETELY. I DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE YOU.

RIGHT. I'LL JUST IMAGINE IT'S SOMETHING LESS STRESSFUL.

LIKE FACING MAGNETO.

REMEMBER: YOU ARE A *PRINCESS.* AND A *GODDESS.* AND AN *X-MAN.*

AND A WOMAN.

AND A WOMAN.

PAN-THER!!
PAN-THER!!

"NO BIG DEAL", HUH?

WHAT CAN I SAY? THEY MISSED ME.

PAN-THER!!
PAN-THER!!

QUEEN MOTHER, YOUR SON, T'CHALLA, HAS RETURNED AND WISHES TO PAY A VISIT.

LOVELY! SEND HIM IN!

HE IS ACCOMPANIED... BY A GUEST.

SON! IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU!

IT IS GOOD TO BE HOME, MOTHER.

MOTHER...THIS IS MY DEAR FRIEND. PRINCESS ORORO MUNROE OF KENYA.

PLEASED TO MEET YOU.

PLEASED? FINALLY! I'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT YOU FOR TEN YEARS!

MOTHER...

LET'S TAKE A WALK.

LATER.

I KNOW HE HURT YOU, BUT THAT BOY NEVER STOPPED LOVING YOU. IT MAY BE HARD FOR YOU TO BELIEVE, BUT I KNOW MY SON.

IT MEANS A LOT TO HEAR IT FROM YOU.

WHEN I SENT HIM OFF TO FIND A WIFE, I PRAYED HE COULD CONVINCE YOU TO COME BACK. MY SON NEVER LETS ME DOWN.

IF WE'VE NEVER MET, WHY DO YOU THINK YOUR SON AND I--

--SHOULD BE MARRIED?

WAKANDA IS A WARRIOR CULTURE. IT TAKES A ***STRONG*** WOMAN TO LEAD AND BREED THESE STRONG MEN. AND HERE YOU ARE. A ***PRINCESS.*** STREET-TOUGH. A WARRIOR ON A GALACTIC SCALE. I HAVE FOLLOWED YOUR ADVENTURES CLOSELY. YOU ARE A HERO WORTHY OF MY SON.

THERE'S ONLY ONE OUTSTANDING QUESTION:

DO YOU LOVE MY SON ENOUGH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE TO BE WITH HIM--

--FOREVER?

LOOK AT THAT CAT IN A TREE.

HOW WAS MOTHER?

AMAZING. LIKE I *IMAGINED* SHE'D BE.

SO SHE DIDN'T SCARE YOU AWAY.

SHE'S TOUGH. BUT SO AM I. WE WOULD GET ALONG FINE.

SO YOU NEVER ANSWERED MY QUESTION.

WHICH WAS?

WILL YOU MARRY ME?

YES.

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-OLIVIER - TOWNSEND
WHITE

WAKANDA...

HAS OUR KING BEEN SO CORRUPTED BY FOREIGN INFLUENCE THAT HE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE BEAUTY OF *OUR* WOMEN?

ARE YOU SAYING STORM ISN'T BEAUTIFUL?

ER, AH, I'M *NOT* SAYING THAT. I'M JUST SAYING--

UH-HUH. THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT!

WHERE'S THE *PRIDE?* WHAT MESSAGE IS HE SENDING TO WAKANDAN *YOUTH?*

I THINK IT'S *WONDERFUL!*

THE POINT OF A ROYAL WEDDING IS TO PRODUCE HEIRS, CORRECT?

WHAT ABOUT *LOVE?!*

WHATEVER. THE QUESTION IS, CAN SHE BEAR CHILDREN? DO THEIR GENES MATCH ENOUGH?

MUTANTS ARE HUMANS WITH SPECIAL ABILITIES. THERE'S NEVER BEEN A PROVEN CASE OF GENETIC INCOMPATABILITY--

EACH MUTATION IS DIFFERENT. STORM SHOULD SUBMIT TO DNA TESTING BEFORE THE CEREMONY OCCURS.

AND YOU'RE GOING TO TELL THE KING YOU INSIST ON THIS?

WELL, AH, I THOUGHT THAT *YOU* WOULD...

I BET YOU DID.

IT'S TOO SOON. THEY SHOULD *DATE* FIRST.

TRUE LOVE DOESN'T NEED TO WAIT.

THEY BARELY KNOW EACH OTHER!

THEY'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE THEY WERE *OUR* AGE.

AVENGERS TOWER...

MARY JANE! COME HERE! YOU HAVE *GOT* TO SEE THIS!

Bride of the Panther

Part 3

ORORO AND I HAVE DECIDED TO GET MARRIED.

WE WANT ALL OF OUR DEAREST FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO ATTEND THE WEDDING!

THIS IS *GREAT!* WHAT A FANTASTIC COUPLE!

WOW. ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST.

NO OFFENSE, PETER...MARY JANE.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?

BACHELOR PARTY!

OH YEAH, IT'S *ON.*

WESTCHESTER, NEW YORK...

I GUESS THAT MEANS SHE'S *REALLY* STAYING IN AFRICA.

MEIN GOTT... I CAN'T BELIEVE IT.

I SAW THEM TOGETHER. BELIEVE ME, NEITHER OF US HAD A REAL SHOT, ELF.

SO ONE OF OUR BEST TEAM-LEADERS IS GONE... THAT'S *IT?*

I CAN'T *BELIEVE* YOU PEOPLE! ONE OF OUR BEST FRIENDS IS GETTING MARRIED AND NOT A SINGLE ONE OF YOU IS *HAPPY* FOR HER?

NOW, KITTY, YOU *KNOW* THAT'S NOT HOW I FEEL--

HEY, I GAVE HER MY BLESSING, FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH--

OF COURSE I AM HAPPY FOR HER, I JUST HATE TO LOSE A FRIEND--

WE'RE SELF-ABSORBED MUTANTS, KITTY. WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

THE BAXTER BUILDING...

PANTHER AND STORM GETTING HITCHED? THAT'S THE HOTTEST COUPLE SINCE... LIKE EVER!

PRESENT COMPANY EXCEPTED, OF COURSE.

NO DISAGREEMENT HERE, JOHNNY. TALK ABOUT THE PERFECT COUPLE.

MM-HMMM!

REED, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE DEAL IS WITH THE DRESS CODE? DO I HAVE TO SQUEEZE INTO THAT TUX I GOT FOR YOUR WEDDING, OR CAN WE WEAR OUR PLAY CLOTHES?

YEAH, IT'S A SUPER HERO WEDDING. ISN'T EVERYBODY GONNA WEAR UNIFORMS?

I DON'T KNOW. WHAT DO *YOU* THINK, SUE?

HMMM...

DRESS CODE.

OH, I DON'T KNOW. THE PANTHER'S GARB IS CEREMONIAL, SO I'D BET HE'D BE WEARING THAT. PLUS HE LOOKS SO CUTE IN IT.

BUT STORM HAS THE BEST WARDROBE OF COSTUMES THIS SIDE OF THE WASP, SO I'M SURE SHE'LL BE IN SOMETHING STUNNING. I'LL GIVE HER A CALL AND CHECK.

THAT LUCKY, LUCKY GIRL.

THE SOUTH OF FRANCE...

MARRIED?!!!!

HOW DARE HE GET ENGAGED TO *ANYONE* BUT ME!

WEDDING OF

ALTHOUGH OUR TIME TOGETHER WAS BRIEF...AND DEFINED MORE BY COMBAT THAN ROMANCE, I COULD TELL THE BOY WAS *ENTRANCED* BY ME!

IT'S TIME FOR *PRINCESS ZANDA* TO LEAVE HER EXILE IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE!

I AM THE ONE DESTINED TO MARRY T'CHALLA AND UNIFY AFRICA--NOT THIS MUTANT HARLOT!

BOOK ME ON THE NEXT FLIGHT TO--WHEREVER HE IS!!!

BUT, YOUR HIGHNESS, YOU ARE WANTED BY THE LAW IN 15 COUNTRIES...

DON'T BORE ME WITH THE DETAILS! JUST *DO IT!*

THE S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER...

LET'S BE REAL. THIS WEDDING IS GONNA BE A TOTAL DISASTER.

YA GOT ***EVERY*** AVENGER AND ***EVERY*** X-MAN EVER SHOWING UP...AND YOU GOT HEADS OF STATE FROM EVERY COUNTRY ON EARTH--AND A FEW ***NOT*** ON EARTH.

AND GIVEN THE WIDE RANGE OF ASSOCIATIONS OF BOTH THE BRIDE AND GROOM, WHO KNOWS WHO ELSE GETS AN INVITE?

EXACTLY. IN OTHER WORDS, THE BIGGEST SECURITY HEADACHE IN THE HISTORY OF THE PLANET.

YA GOT FIDEL CASTRO AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES COMING TO THE SAME EVENT.

HOW ABOUT ***PRINCE NAMOR*** AND ***REED RICHARDS*** AT THE SAME EVENT?

EVEN IF THE GUESTS DON'T KILL EACH OTHER, THIS WHOLE EVENT IS AN IRRESISTIBLE TARGET FOR EVERY TERRORIST, PSYCHOPATH AND SUPER-VILLAIN WHO WANTS TO WIPE OUT THE WHOLE CAPE COMMUNITY AND THE POLITICIANS ALL AT ONCE!

TO MAKE MATTERS EVEN MORE COMPLICATED, IT'S NOT LIKE WE GOT A GREAT HISTORY OF WORKING WITH THE HOST COUNTRY.

WAKANDANS ARE PRETTY XENOPHOBIC, NO DOUBT. NICE ENOUGH, BUT VERY SUSPICIOUS OF ALL OUTSIDERS. WHATEVER WE DO IS GONNA HAVE TO BE ON TOP OF THEIR SECURITY, NOT IN CONCERT WITH IT.

DON'T WE HAVE SOME EXPERT FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT? LET'S BRING HIM IN.

COLONEL DUGAN, ***EVERETT ROSS,*** EXPERT ON WAKANDAN AFFAIRS.

ALRIGHT, EVERETT. YA GOT 30 SECONDS. TELL ME SOMETHING I DON'T KNOW.

THE BRONX, NEW YORK...

BRADLEY 42

A PACKAGE. SPECIAL DELIVERY!

YOU MAY NOT BE FAMOUS, BUT WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE. AND IT WOULD MEAN THE WORLD TO US IF YOU WOULD HONOR US WITH YOUR PRESENCE.

WE'LL MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOUR TRAVEL IF YOU AND A GUEST ARE INTERESTED IN COMING TO WAKANDA FOR THE WEDDING.

DOES GRANDPA KNOW THEM?

I-I DON'T THINK SO.

ARE YOU GOING TO GO?

I'M...NOT SURE.

DO YOU THINK THEY'LL LET HIM LEAVE THE COUNTRY? HE'S BEEN AMERICA'S SECRET FOR OVER 60 YEARS. THEY HAVEN'T EVEN LET YOU GO TO CANADA!

THIS IS DIFFERENT. A *ROYAL* INVITATION.

THEY'RE THE GOVERNMENT, GRANDMA. THEY DON'T *HAVE* TO DO ANYTHING.

WE'LL SEE.

I STILL HAVE CAPTAIN AMERICA'S NUMBER...

BACK IN WAKANDA...

HUNDREDS OF GUESTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. THE GREATEST INFLUX OF FOREIGN GUESTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE NATION.

THIS WEDDING IS A BLESSED EVENT, BUT A SECURITY DISASTER.

AT LEAST THEY WILL BE CONTAINED IN THESE NEW RESIDENCES. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE EVER HAD ANYTHING RESEMBLING A HOTEL HERE.

THERE WILL BE ENOUGH MONITORING DEVICES BUILT INTO THE STRUCTURE TO MAKE SURE WE KNOW OF ANY TROUBLE BEFORE IT STARTS. THAT MANY SUPER-POWERED BEINGS IN ONE PLACE *ALWAYS* ENDS IN A BRAWL.

SPEAKING OF SECURITY...ANY NEW INFORMATION ON WHAT COULD BE OUR GREATEST RISK?

SO FAR, SHE CHECKS OUT. NO KNOWN ASSOCIATIONS WITH FACTIONS THAT MIGHT THREATEN WAKANDA.

YOU MEAN, BESIDES HER WORK FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

CONSIDERING THE HISTORY OF AMERICA'S HOSTILE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MUTANT POPULATION, I THINK THAT MAY BE A PLUS FOR US.

WHAT ABOUT HER COMMITMENT LEVEL?

HER LAST MAJOR ROMANCE WAS SEVERAL YEARS AGO, TO A MUTANT NAMED FORGE. BUT THAT SEEMS TO BE A CLOSED CHAPTER.

WITH MATTERS OF THE *HEART*, WHO KNOWS?

WASHINGTON, D.C....

MONICA LYNNE SOLD OUT!!!

LOVE IS LIKE WATER. IT CAN QUENCH YOUR THIRST, BRING YOU BACK TO LIFE.

OR IT CAN BE A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE, LIKE A HURRICANE OR A FLOOD. IT CAN **DROWN** YOU.

LOVE IS NOT GOOD OR BAD, BUT IT IS A FORCE OF NATURE AND YOU BETTER RESPECT IT! LOVE CAN **KILL** YOU!

OKAY, WHAT'S THIS RANT ABOUT?

DON'T YOU KNOW? HER EX-BOYFRIEND JUST GOT ENGAGED.

THE AFRICAN DUDE? SUPER HERO?

THE BLACK PANTHER.

BUT DIDN'T ***SHE*** DUMP HIM?

EXACTLY.

SO SHE'S UPSET THAT THE MULTI-ZILLIONAIRE AVENGER WAS ABLE TO FIND ANOTHER WOMAN ATTRACTED TO HIM?

HE'S MARRYING STORM.

OF THE X-MEN...? WHOO-HOO! HE'S MY ***HERO!***

BETTER NOT LET ***HER*** HEAR YOU SAY THAT. YOU'LL BE WITH ONE LESS CLIENT. IMAGINE HOW SHE FEELS?

LIKE JENNIFER ANISTON.

TIMES TEN.

DALLAS, TEXAS...

PEOPLE THINK MY MUTANT POWER IS TO BUILD MACHINERY.

BUT IT'S REALLY THE ABILITY TO SEE ***CONNECTIONS.*** CONNECTIONS THAT MOST PEOPLE--IF THEIR NAME ISN'T REED RICHARDS--DON'T SEE.

IT'S CALMING...LIKE CROSSWORD PUZZLES OR SOLITAIRE FOR OTHER PEOPLE.

@#4@#2 $@#$@#%^* @#4@#2 $@#$@#%v* @#h@#2

RIGHT, OR THAT, TOO.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY MY ABILITY IS LIMITED TO TECHNOLOGY. I SEEM TO MISS HUMAN CONNECTIONS ENTIRELY.

@#h@#2)(v$%¿E

DON'T RUB IT IN.

YOU KNOW, I NEVER SAW THIS BLACK PANTHER THING COMING. NOW I'M JEALOUS THAT A WOMAN I PUSHED AWAY HAS FOUND SOMEONE ELSE.

I HOPE THIS WORKS OUT BETTER FOR ORORO THAN OUR EMOTIONAL TRAIN-WRECK.

SHE DESERVES NOTHING BUT THE BEST.

THE UNITED NATIONS...

MY COUSIN AND HIS FIANCEÉ ARE COMING TO NEW YORK. WE MUST PREPARE A RECEPTION!

I HAVE TO SAY, YOUR ENTHUSIASM ABOUT YOUR COUSIN'S WEDDING IS ADMIRABLE.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

WELL, I MEAN.... UH....SIR, IT'S WELL KNOWN THAT YOU AND HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS WERE BOTH...COMPETITORS FOR THE THRONE.

ADMIRABLE, AMBASSADOR T'SHAN! WHAT BROUGHT ABOUT SUCH PERSPECTIVE CHANGE?

I AM NOW MATURE ENOUGH TO ADMIT WE WERE NEVER *TRULY* RIVALS.

AFTER MY NEAR-FATAL PLANE CRASH, I HAD A... WELL, HOW TO PUT IT...

"...A *COMPLETE* CHANGE OF MIND."

I CANNOT WAIT TO GIVE THEM MY PERSONAL CONGRATULATIONS ON THIS BLESSED EVENT. WITH THIS UNION, THE FUTURE OF WAKANDA IS SECURE!

SOMEWHERE OVER THE ATLANTIC...

THIS ISN'T REALLY NECESSARY, T'CHALLA.

NONSENSE. YOU'VE RECONNECTED WITH YOUR MOTHER'S FAMILY,* AND NOW WE WILL FIND YOUR *FATHER'S.*

YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT MY SIDE OF THE AISLE BEING SPARSE. THE X-MEN HAVE BEEN MY FAMILY FOR SOME TIME NOW.

OF COURSE THEY ARE. BUT AS WE START A NEW FAMILY TOGETHER, WE NEED ALL THE BRANCHES REPRESENTED. THE MUTANT, THE WAKANDAN, THE KENYAN, THE AMERICAN...

I TRIED LOOKING FOR THEM ONCE BEFORE. THE APARTMENT WHERE MY PARENTS LIVED IN HARLEM WAS A CRACK HOUSE.

*SEE UNCANNY X-MEN ANNUAL #1 FOR THAT STORY. --EDITOR.

IT'S A LOT TO PREPARE FOR MARRIAGE AND MEET BOTH YOUR FAMILY AND MY OWN ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

THERE IS NO "*PREPARING*" FOR MARRIAGE. WE EITHER WANT TO BE TOGETHER OR NOT.

OF COURSE, DARLING.

EVERY CEREMONY AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STATECRAFT, T'CHALLA?

WELCOME TO YOUR NEW LIFE.

THE RESOURCES OF THE WAKANDAN SECURITY TEAM SHOULD YIELD BETTER RESULTS.

AS FOR YOUR FAMILY--WE NEED TO FIND THEM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I'M SURE WE'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES LOOKING FOR THEM.

NEW JERSEY...

GRANDDAD, *24's* ABOUT TO START!

I GOT NO TIME FOR THAT NONSENSE, BOY. WHY WOULD I--

DING DONG

ANSWER THE DOOR, BOY.

WAIT--MAKE SURE IT'S NOT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES, *THEN* ANSWER THE DOOR.

WHO *IS* IT, BOY?

GRANDPA, YOU'RE NOT GONNA BELIEVE THIS...

IT'S HYDRA.

HYDRA? YOU MEAN LIKE--

"--CUT OFF AN ARM, AND TWO SHALL TAKE ITS PLACE"? YEAH, THEM.

BOY, GIT AWAY FROM THAT DOOR.

DING DONG

HOLD ON!

DID HE SAY "HYDRA"?

DING DONG

HOLD ON! I'M IN THE BATHROOM!

SMASH!

KLIKLIKLIK

I'VE *HAD* IT WITH THE CANDYGRAM CRAP!

HAIL HYDRA!

YES, HE DID. I *KNEW* SOMEBODY WOULD COME LOOKING FOR US SOONER OR LATER. BUT I GOT SOMETHING FOR THEM.

DAMMIT, WHAT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY, BOY?

WRONG HOUSE.

BOOM

SMASH

WILL CALLED TUES

10:00

CRACKIES

I CAN'T BELIEVE THESE AMATEURS GOT A LUCKY SHOT--

AMATEURS?! WE BEEN WHUPPING BUTT SINCE BEFORE YOU WERE BORN! I WAS TRAINED IN SELF-DEFENSE BY THE FRUIT OF ISLAM, FOOL!

BOOOMTTTG

GDDD... MY FACE....

AIN'T GONNA BE NUTHIN' COMPARED TO YOUR HEAD.

YOU OKAY IN THERE, HARRIET?

BOOMTTTG

I'M FINE. HE'S GOT BRAIN DAMAGE.

THEY ONLY SENT *TWO* FOR US?
PLAYED US CHEAP 'CAUSE WE'RE OLD. AIN'T NOBODY SLIPPING 'ROUND HERE!
DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. MUST BE MORE OUTSIDE.
YOU OKAY IN THERE, BOY?
YES, SIR.
GOOD. SIT TIGHT, AND DON'T LEAVE 'TIL I TELL YA.
SEE ANYTHING?
YEP. A DEAD HYDRA AGENT ON THE FRONT PORCH.
ANYTHING ELSE?
I KNOW YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING--JUST TELL ME THE CONTACT INFORMATION OF YOUR SUPERIOR.
JUST *÷URK÷* KILL ME. I DON'T CARE.
PULL OUT THE GOOD SILVERWARE--WE GOT *COMPANY!*
THERE ARE TECHNIQUES FAR WORSE THAN DEATH.

MR. AND MRS. MUNROE?

YOUR HIGHNESS!

PLEASE, YOU EMBARRASS ME. IT IS I WHO NEED TO BOW BEFORE YOU.

BECAUSE OF YOU, I HAVE HAPPINESS. BECAUSE OF YOU, I HAVE ORORO.

ORORO? IS SHE HERE?

I DIDN'T SEE ANY MORE AGENTS, T'CHALLA. I--

IS THAT... THEM?

TEN MINUTES LATER...

WE WERE TOLD YOU DIED WITH YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER. BUT WE SUSPECTED--

HOPED.

--THAT YOU MIGHT STILL BE ALIVE.

PHOTOS

WHENEVER WE SAW THE X-MEN ON TV, WE ALWAYS REMARKED THAT STORM LOOKED LIKE OUR GRANDDAUGHTER ALL GROWN UP, BUT WE HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING FOR SURE--

UNTIL NOW.

WELL, I CAN CERTAINLY SEE WHERE ORORO GETS HER WARRIOR SPIRIT FROM. YOU ALL SEEMED SURPRISINGLY PREPARED FOR SUCH AN ATTACK.

BOTH OF US HAVE A PRETTY DEEP HISTORY WITH RADICAL LEFT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE '60s. AFTER MALCOLM, MARTIN AND KENNEDY WERE SHOT, WE FIGURED THIS COUNTRY WAS GOING TO GET ***WORSE*** BEFORE IT GOT BETTER--DECIDED TO GET "OFF THE GRID," LAY LOW SO WE WOULDN'T GET PERSECUTED FOR OUR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES.

BUT WE'VE BEEN ARMED AND READY FOR J. EDGAR TO KNOCK ON OUR DOOR FOR A WHILE!

BUT I DON'T GET WHY ***HYDRA*** WAS LOOKING FOR US.

WITH STORM'S HIGHER PROFILE BECAUSE OF THE WEDDING, THEY PROBABLY PLANNED TO ***KIDNAP*** YOU-- MAYBE EVEN REPLACE YOU AS A WAY TO MANIPULATE ME.

BUT HOW'D THEY KNOW THAT WE--?

BECAUSE THEY'RE ***HYDRA.***

ARE THERE ANY OTHER RELATIVES WE NEED TO PROTECT?

THIS IS IT. DAVID'S SISTER-- YOUR AUNT--GOT HOOKED ON THAT STUFF, AND DIED OF ***AIDS.*** SO IT'S US...AND OUR GRANDSON, LIL' DAVID.

WELL, NOW WE ARE A FAMILY AGAIN. I WILL BE SO HAPPY TO HAVE ALL OF YOU AT MY WEDDING!

SO, LITTLE MAN, HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO AFRICA?

ARE YOU KIDDING? I'VE NEVER BEEN OUTSIDE THE TRI-STATE AREA!

I'LL GO ANYWHERE ***SHE*** GOES!

DAVID! THAT'S YOUR AUNT!

WHATEVER!

SOMEWHERE IN AFRICA...

CAN YOU *BELIEVE* IT? A SIMPLE EXTRACTION OF TWO ELDERLY PEOPLE--AND THEY BLEW IT.

HYDRA HASN'T BEEN THE SAME SINCE BARON STRUCKER DIED.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST THEM. THERE'S A POWER VACUUM.

"THE RED SKULL IS DEAD.

"MAGNETO IS MISSING, RUMORED TO BE POWERLESS.

"THE GREEN GOBLIN'S IN JAIL."

THE MAN-APE!!!

NO ONE BUT *US*. AND NOW THE WORLD WILL LEARN TO FEAR THE FURY OF--

SO NOW, WITH EVERY SO-CALLED SUPER HERO, EVERY MUTANT, EVERY WORLD LEADER CONVENIENTLY GATHERED IN ONE SPOT, IS THERE NO ONE WHO CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION AND TAKE THEM ALL OUT AT ONCE?

17

LINSNER
·2006·

THE APARTMENT OF LUKE CAGE AND JESSICA JONES...

NO, THE *WHOLE* CLUB. THESE ARE V.I.P.'S--I DON'T WANT NOBODY KNOWING WHO WAS THERE.

PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY, YOU GOT ME? I WANT THE WHOLE BLOCK SHUT DOWN. AND THE BLOCKS SURROUNDING THE BLOCK.

IS SERENITY STILL THERE? UH-HUH...WHAT ABOUT JADE?

AND ECSTASY? CAN SHE STILL DO THAT TRICK WITH--

HEY, HONEY, WHAT YOU WORKING ON?

UH...*WORK.* PERSONAL BUSINESS.

UH-HUH.

YEAH, LIKE I WAS SAYING...

OH YEAH? SHE *CAN*? HELL YEAH!

Bride of the Panther Part 4
BACHELOR PARTY

MIDTOWN MANHATTAN...

HELLO, MY NAME IS T'SHAN. I AM THE WAKANDAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS, SERVING UNDER MY KING--AND COUSIN--T'CHALLA, ALSO KNOWN AS THE BLACK PANTHER.

WE ARE HERE TO DISCUSS THE UPCOMING WEDDING OF T'CHALLA AND ORORO MUNROE, KNOWN TO MANY OF YOU AS STORM OF THE X-MEN.

DESPITE THEIR HIGH PUBLIC PROFILE, T'CHALLA AND ORORO ARE VERY PRIVATE PEOPLE. BUT CONSIDERING THE MAGNITUDE OF THE EVENT, THEY HAVE GRACIOUSLY CONSENTED TO THIS PRESS CONFERENCE.

WHO'S YOUR BEST MAN?

WHO'S DESIGNING THE DRESS?

HOW DID HE PROPOSE?

CAN WE SEE THE RING?

RINGS ARE NOT TYPICALLY PART OF THE WAKANDAN MARRIAGE RITUAL.

AWWWW

BUT IN ANTICIPATION OF SUCH QUESTIONS....

OOOOOOOHHHHH!

KING T'CHALLA, YOUR HAPPY EVENT IS OCCURRING WHEN THERE'S A LOT OF CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE PROPER ROLE OF SUPER HEROES IN SOCIETY. WITH CONGRESS DEBATING THE PROPOSED ***SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT***, TELL US: WOULD ***YOU*** EVER CONSIDER A REGISTRATION ACT IN YOUR COUNTRY?

IT IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR ME TO COMMENT ON U.S. DOMESTIC POLICY. HOWEVER, I WILL SAY I FOUGHT ALONGSIDE MANY AMERICAN SUPER HEROES, AND I HAVE FOUND ALMOST ALL OF THEM TO BE MEN AND WOMEN OF GREAT COURAGE WHO HAVE PUT THEIR LIVES, AND THE LIVES OF THEIR LOVED ONES, ON THE LINE FOR THE SAKE OF MANKIND.

YES, BUT IN YOUR ***OWN*** COUNTRY?

I HAVE FACED DISCRIMINATION AS AN AFRICAN, AS A WOMAN AND AS A MUTANT MY ENTIRE LIFE. WAKANDA IS NOT A COUNTRY THAT WASTES PRECIOUS HUMAN RESOURCES ON ***WITCH-HUNTS***. THAT'S WHY IT LEADS THE WORLD IN BOTH TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES AND HUMAN RIGHTS.

WE HOPE OUR WEDDING WILL BE A SYMBOL OF LOVE THAT UNITES ALL PEOPLES.

CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP!

I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DO THAT FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.

PANTHER

YOU'RE SO GOOD AT IT.

MY COMMENTS MADE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE, I CAN TELL.

ACTUALLY, YOU SOUNDED LIKE MY FATHER.

AVENGERS TOWER...

SURPRISED TO SEE *YOU* STILL HERE.

I HAD TO MAKE SOME PHONE CALLS, AND THEY'RE *NOT* THE KIND YOU WANNA MAKE FROM HOME.

OH YEAH. THE BACHELOR PARTY.

OKAY, DIDN'T YOU AND STORM HAVE A "THING"? I DON'T KNOW IF T'CHALLA IS EVEN GOING TO BE OPEN TO A BACHELOR PARTY, LET ALONE ONE WHERE A GUY WHO, WELL, HIT IT WITH HIS FIANCÉE IS NEXT TO HIM GETTING A LAP DANCE.

YOU'RE A STRAIGHT SHOOTER, CAGE. I LIKE THAT. SO LET'S SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.

ONE: I NEVER, AS YOU SAY, "HIT IT." *WANTED* TO-- BUT WHO DIDN'T? PRESENT COMPANY INCLUDED.

TRUE DAT.

TWO: ORORO IS FAMILY TO ME. NOW *T'CHALLA* IS GOING TO BE FAMILY. I'D LIKE TO MAKE A GESTURE TO BREAK THE ICE.

I BEEN AROUND A LONG TIME. AND WHILE USING *THESE* IS THE THING I DO BEST--

--THE *NEXT* BEST THING I DO IS HAVE A DAMN GOOD TIME. I GOTTA LOT OF GOOD FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES. I CAN BRING A LOT TO THE PARTY. WHETHER T'CHALLA HAS A GOOD TIME OR NOT, I *GUARANTEE* EVERYBODY ELSE WILL.

SNIKT!

"GAR-RUN-TEE," HUH? SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU'RE A MAN OF YOUR WORD.

LET'S DO THIS.

ABSOLUTELY NOT.

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE FEELING, BUT YOU'LL REGRET IT IF YOU DON'T.

WHEN IN ROME, COUSIN!

THERE ARE WESTERN TRADITIONS THAT BAFFLE ME, AND *THIS* IS ONE OF THEM. WHY WOULD I WANT TO SHOW UP ON MY WEDDING DAY WITH THE SMELL OF ANOTHER WOMAN ON ME?

I UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING. AND I'M RIGHT THERE WITH YOU. I'M JUST SAYING--FOREVER IS A *LOOONG* TIME. THE WINDOW IS CLOSING RAPIDLY, MY MAN.

THE WEDDING IS A CEREMONY TO CELEBRATE A COMMITMENT I'VE ALREADY MADE IN MY HEART. I AM *ALREADY* MARRIED.

IF NOT FOR YOURSELF, THEN FOR YOUR FRIENDS!

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A FLIMSY PRETEXT TO FONDLE OTHER WOMEN, I'M SURE YOU CAN FIND A BETTER EXCUSE THAN MY WEDDING.

I HATE THAT. I'M A GROWN MAN, HOW DID HE MAKE ME FEEL SO IMMATURE?

THIS IS *BUT* THE FIRST ROUND.

I MEAN, THIS IS A PERFECTLY GOOD TRADITION HERE!

FIFTH AVENUE, MANHATTAN...

I REALLY NEEDED THIS.

A LITTLE RETAIL THERAPY NEVER HURT ANYBODY.

I JUST NEEDED TO GET AWAY FROM SPEECHES AND SEATING CHARTS.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU ARE MANAGING IT ALL, ORORO.

YOU'D THINK THAT ALL THESE YEARS OF MAINTAINING A LOOK WHILE FIGHTING FOR YOUR LIFE WOULD MAKE SOMETHING LIKE THIS EASY.

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR. BUT SPEAKING OF MAINTAINING A LOOK--DO YOU BLOW-DRY YOUR OWN HAIR, I MEAN, NATURALLY?

IT'S THE ONLY WAY I COULD KEEP IT THIS LONG.

HA! I *KNEW* IT! WAIT TILL I TELL JEN. YOU KNOW--SHE-HULK.

"STORM SPILLS BEAUTY SECRETS"-- COVER OF THE NEXT ISSUE OF *O!*

O?

Y'KNOW, O? OPRAH'S MAGAZINE?

NO.

WELL, GET TO KNOW IT. BECAUSE YOU'RE ABOUT TO BE THE MOST HIGH-PROFILE MUTANT IN THE WORLD. AND OPRAH WILL BE CALLING.

EXCUSE ME, LADIES... HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

I HATE TO SOUND PRETENTIOUS, BUT WOULD YOU MIND LOCKING YOUR DOORS WHILE WE SHOP? I COULD CONTINUE TO HOLD THEM CLOSED WITH MY FORCE FIELD....

NO PROBLEM AT ALL. WE CATER TO VERY SPECIAL CUSTOMERS LIKE YOURSELF ALL THE TIME, MS. RICHARDS.

GLAD TO HAVE YOU BACK SO SOON, MS. MUNROE. HAVE YOU RECONSIDERED THAT OUTFIT YOU TRIED ON?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I'VE ***NEVER*** BEEN IN THIS STORE BEFORE!

WHOO-BOY. *"WHEN RACIAL PROFILING GOES REALLY, REALLY WRONG..."*

PLEASE, ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN MYSELF. I'M NOT A FOOL. YOUR PICTURE IS EVERYWHERE.

SO WHEN A BEAUTIFUL, STATUESQUE, CHOCOLATE-BROWN WOMAN WITH AN EXOTIC ACCENT COMES INTO MY STORE, SHOPPING FOR, AS SHE SAID HERSELF, "HER UPCOMING WEDDING TO THE BLACK PANTHER"...OF COURSE I THINK IT'S YOU!

DID SHE HAVE THIS HAIR? HOW CAN YOU MISS THE HAIR?

TO BE HONEST, SOME OF MY CUSTOMERS CHANGE THEIR HAIR COLOR EVERY WEEK.

DID SHE PAY FOR HER PURCHASES? OR ASK FOR FREEBIES?

CASH!

LATER...

WAKANDAN EMBASSY

CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT-- SOMEONE IMITATING ME?

WHO DO YOU THINK IT IS? MYSTIQUE? SOME OTHER DOPPELGANGER?

I HAVE NOTICED A WAVE OF WOMEN WITH YOUR LOOK IN FASHION MAGAZINES SINCE THE WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENT. THEY ALL SEEM FRIGHTFULLY THIN. I THINK I SHOULD SEND BAGS OF GRAIN TO MODELING AGENCIES.

VERY FUNNY. BUT SERIOUSLY, DON'T YOU THINK WE NEED TO FIND THIS PERSON BEFORE THEY DO SOMETHING THAT MISREPRESENTS US? WHAT IF SHE TEAMS UP WITH A MAN IN A CAT SUIT AND THEY STEAL AN OLD WOMAN'S PURSE?

PEOPLE WILL THINK WHAT THEY WILL. DON'T YOU READ WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT US ON THE INTERNET?

T'CHALLA! ARE YOU GOOGLING YOURSELF?

PART OF MY RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE--

GOOGLER!

WEDDIN BELLES

SOMEONE NEEDS TO LEARN A LITTLE RESPECT FOR THE THRONE--

SOMEONE WISHES THEY COULD--

T'CHALLA? WHERE DID YOU GO?

YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR THIS, WOMAN!

GET USED TO IT. THE MOTHER CARRIES THE X GENE, YOU KNOW.

FHOOOOOOOOSH

--YES.

WELL, ACTUALLY--

--YOU CAN GET AWAY FROM ME?

YOU DON'T THINK--

I DIDN'T BLOW YOU OFF THE ROOF, DID I?

SLAM

CLICK

IS THAT YOU? SAY SOMETHING!

LIGHTS. LOW.

DARLING, ARE YOU OKAY? I DIDN'T MEAN TO HIT YOU! THAT LIGHTNING BOLT....

JUST A LOVE TAP. YOU THINK I WOULD BE WITH A WEATHER WITCH WITHOUT AN INSULATED SUIT?

THE CLEVER BOY FROM WAKANDA.

CAP PASSED ON THE MESSAGE FROM THE BRADLEYS TO ME. HE'S A LITTLE ***INDISPOSED*** AT THE MOMENT...

I HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING THE NEWS REPORTS.

EXIT

....BUT WE HAVE TO GET HIM TO THIS WEDDING. I DON'T CARE WHAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAYS!

MR. WILSON, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND OUR SITUATION. WE WOULD HATE TO CREATE AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT WITH THE UNITED STATES AT THIS SENSITIVE TIME--

KA-BOOM!

OKAY, THAT'S THE ***SECOND*** THUNDERCLAP WITH NO RAIN OUTSIDE.

ARE T'CHALLA AND STORM HERE? I'D LOVE TO SAY HI.

"MY GUESS, MR. WILSON, IS THAT THEY ARE... INDISPOSED."

MEANWHILE, SOMEWHERE IN AFRICA...

IF T'CHALLA WAS *SERIOUS* ABOUT MAINTAINING PEACE BETWEEN OUR TWO TRIBES, HE WOULD HAVE MARRIED ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL WOMEN FROM OUR CLAN.

YEAH!

YEAH!

NOT ONLY DOES HE MARRY SOMEONE FROM OUTSIDE OF OUR REGION--

NOOOOOO!

--BUT HE DOESN'T EVEN SEND ME A *WEDDING INVITATION!*

THE NEXT MORNING...

WHAT DID YOU WANT TO DO FRIDAY NIGHT? WE'RE INVITED TO DINNER AT THE WHITE HOUSE AND A PARTY AT PRINCE'S HOUSE. IF YOU WANTED TO DO BOTH, WE COULD MAKE IT TO L.A. FROM D.C. IN TIME--

MAIL
WAKANDA

ACTUALLY, I HAVE PLANS.

PLANS?

SO, THIS IS A... "*BACHELORETTE*" PARTY? WHO'S THE STRIPPER? EROS?

OH PLEASE. I DON'T THINK SUE RICHARDS WOULD EMBARRASS HERSELF THAT WAY.

ROGUE WOULD.

THE GIRLS WANTED TO TAKE ME OUT FOR A NIGHT ON THE TOWN BEFORE THE WEDDING. I AGREED.

DON'T YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS HAVE SOMETHING SIMILAR PLANNED FOR *YOU?* WHY DON'T YOU DO THAT FRIDAY NIGHT?

WHAAA-HOOO!!

I KNOW YOUR JAW'S TIGHT NOW, T'CHALLA, BUT YOU WILL *NOT* REGRET THIS.

I AM ALREADY REGRETTING THIS.

THEN WHY GO AT ALL, T'CHALLA?

BECAUSE *YOU* ASKED ME TO, LOGAN.

ME?

YOU LOOKED OUT FOR STORM DURING HER JOURNEY BACK THROUGH AFRICA. WHEN I ASKED YOU TO SECURE A PACKAGE FOR ME, AND BRING IT TO SAFETY, YOU DID. FOR THAT, I AM GRATEFUL.

SO WHEN YOU EXTENDED AN INVITATION TO ME, I ACCEPTED.

RIO, BABY. YOU KNOW HOW I DO IT.

I'M TELLING YA. ***MADRIPOOR*** SHOULDA BEEN THE PICK. I GOT THE WHOLE PLACE WIRED.

NO DISRESPECT TO THE LOVELY LADIES OF MADRIPOOR, BUT FOR BROTHERS? THE VARIETY OF BRAZIL IS WHAT IT'S ***ALL ABOUT.***

YES, SURELY T'CHALLA WILL FIND A WOMAN THERE THAT WILL ENTRANCE HIM. AND ONCE HE MAKES HIS CHOICE...

...I WILL USE MY POWERS TO STEAL HER BODY. AND USE HER BODY TO STEAL HIS!

GENTLEMEN, LET THE ***GAMES*** BEGIN!

MY SWEET AUNT PETUNIA...

SWEET CHRISTMAS...

IMPERIUS REX...

〈I CAN TELL YOU ARE SPECIAL. EVEN IN THIS GROUP.〉

〈IT WOULD BE OUR PLEASURE TO MAKE YOU HAPPY. JUST CHOOSE ONE.〉

HOT

〈OR CHOOSE SEVERAL.〉

UH. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

MEANS PARTY'S OVER. LET'S GO HOME.

DON'T BE SO BUMMED OUT, T'SHAN. YOUR COUSIN'S A HAPPY MAN.

YES, I JUST WANTED HIM TO HAVE...A SPECIAL EXPERIENCE.

I GUESS *THAT'S* WHAT THE WEDDING IS FOR.

MIDTOWN MANHATTAN...

NO, I SAID IN *BLUE!* AND SHOES TO MATCH!

IF YOU PLEASE ME, YOUR STORE WILL BE MENTIONED IN EVERY MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD. AND MY HUSBAND, THE BLACK PANTHER, WILL LOOK KINDLY UPON YOU.

AH-HA!

PRINCESS ZANDA! THE PARIS HILTON OF AFRICA! SO IT'S *YOU* THAT'S BEEN IMPERSONATING ME!

IMPERSONATING YOU? YOU FLATTER YOURSELF.

I JUST HEARD YOU SAY YOU'RE MARRYING THE BLACK PANTHER!

I AM. YOU DON'T HONESTLY BELIEVE HE WANTS TO BE WITH ANYONE BUT ME, DO YOU?

ONCE I TELL T'CHALLA HE DOESN'T NEED TO SETTLE, THAT I WON'T REJECT HIM, HE'LL BE WITH HIS TRUE LOVE.

WHAT IS THIS--AN EPISODE OF *"FLAVOR OF LOVE"*?

IF YOUR COUNTRY SPENT AS MUCH ON EDUCATION AS YOU DO ON HANDBAGS, THEY COULD PRODUCE A PSYCHIATRIST WHO COULD TREAT YOUR PSYCHOSIS.

DON'T HATE ME BECAUSE I'M BEAUTIFUL, STREET URCHIN.

FWOOOOOOOSHWOOOOOOP

FREAK OF NATURE! CAN'T FACE A *REAL* WOMAN WITHOUT RESORTING TO WITCHCRAFT!

LET ME DO IT, STORM. LET ME HANDLE IT.

NO, KITTY, IT'S BENEATH ALL OF US.

I HAVE *ARMIES* AT MY DISPOSAL! WEAPONS THAT WILL DRAIN YOUR POWERS AND GRIND YOU INTO DUST!

GET YOUR FINGER OUT OF MY FACE.

AND IF I DON'T?

YOU DIDN'T BREAK A NAIL, DID YOU?

NO, I'M FINE. I FEEL GREAT, ACTUALLY.

MAYBE THE SECURITY CAMERAS GOT IT ON TAPE, SO WE COULD WATCH IT AGAIN!

ICE FOR YOUR EYE, MADAM?

YOU ARE ALL *WITNESSES!* I'M GOING TO *SUE!*

YOU'RE HOME! I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU BACK UNTIL--

I HAD TO CUT OUR LITTLE EXCURSION SHORT. WHAT'S THE EXPRESSION? " *THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED...*"?

NAMOR AND THE THING-- NO PROBLEMS?

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, NO.

A TESTAMENT TO YOUR CALMING INFLUENCE.

RIGHT.

I REALLY MISSED YOU.

YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

SO.

SO.

READY TO GO HOME AND GET MARRIED?

NEVER MORE READY.

SHOE STORE

18
CHO

HI, THIS IS TOURÉ--

--AND THIS IS ANANDA--

--AND WE'RE COMING TO YOU LIVE FROM WAKANDA, WHERE BET IS COVERING THE WEDDING OF THE CENTURY!

BET

ORORO MUNROE, AN AFRICAN PRINCESS TURNED LEADER OF THE WELL-KNOWN MUTANT SUPER HERO GROUP THE X-MEN--

--IS GOING TO MARRY *KING T'CHALLA*, RULER OF THE AFRICAN NATION OF WAKANDA, BUT BETTER KNOWN TO MOST AMERICANS AS *THE BLACK PANTHER*.

FORGET HILLARY AND BILL. FORGET REED AND SUE. THIS IS THE *NEW* ULTIMATE POWER COUPLE.

WHY SO, TOURÉ?

T'CHALLA IS THE KING OF ONE OF THE MOST TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED COUNTRIES ON EARTH, A LAND OVERFLOWING WITH NATURAL RESOURCES-- LIKE *VIBRANIUM*, AN ULTRA-PRECIOUS METAL THAT CAN'T BE FOUND ANYWHERE ELSE ON EARTH.

SO EXACTLY *HOW MUCH* CHEESE ARE WE TALKING HERE?

WE'VE HAD A RESEARCH TEAM FROM *BLACK ENTERPRISE* ON IT FOR A WEEK, AND THEY KEEP BUSTING CALCULATORS.

GOT IT.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT MONEY. THEY'RE *SUPER HEROES!*

T'CHALLA IS THE WORLD'S HIGHEST-PROFILE BLACK SUPER HERO.

STORM IS WORSHIPPED AS A *GODDESS* IN MANY PARTS OF AFRICA. SHE CAN END A DROUGHT AT THE SNAP OF HER FINGERS.

AND WITH FRIENDS LIKE *REED RICHARDS, TONY STARK, PRINCE NAMOR* AND *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, IT'S HARD TO FIND A COUPLE WITH MORE JUICE IN THE SUPER HERO COMMUNITY.

BUT THOSE FRIENDSHIPS ARE ABOUT TO BE PUT TO THE *TEST* TODAY.

WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S INSISTENCE OF *REGISTRATION* OF *ALL SUPER-POWERED BEINGS* CAUSING A *DEEP RIFT* BETWEEN EVEN THE CLOSEST OF ALLIES IN THE CAPED COMMUNITY, THE QUESTION IS: *WHO* IS GOING TO SHOW UP TODAY? AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY...

"...WILL THEY *BEHAVE?"*

...NEVER WOULD'VE FIGURED YOU--OF ALL PEOPLE--WOULD THROW IN WITH STARK'S PRO-REGISTRATION POSSE, BUT HEY, YOU *ARE* COMMITTED, I'LL GIVE YOU THAT. IT TOOK SOME STONES TO LET THE WHOLE WORLD KNOW YOUR SECRET IDEN--

I'LL...UH... TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT, LUKE.

HEY--IS THAT *ANT-MAN* OVER THERE...?

I'M SURPRISED YOU CAME, REED. I MEAN, AFTER T'CHALLA REJECTED YOUR LITTLE *OVERTURE,* I FIGURED--

PLEASE, SUE. THIS ISN'T THE TIME OR PLACE.

GEEZ, GUYS. CAN'T WE JUST TAKE A TIME-OUT?

I'M *SO* HAPPY FOR STORM. SHE SEEMS *SO* HAPPY. I MEAN--

DO TRY TO CONTAIN YOURSELF, KATHERINE.

I WONDER WHAT THIS WILL MEAN FOR HER OBLIGATIONS AS AN X-MAN?

HOW ABOUT YA JUST RELAX AND ENJOY THE CEREMONY FIRST, CYKE?

MEANWHILE, THE PSYCHIC PARASITE KNOWN AS THE CANNIBAL PREPARES HIS TRAP...

OH, THE TEMPTATION. SO MANY *POWERFUL HOSTS* FOR ME TO INHABIT.

NO, STICK TO THE PLAN. KISS THE BRIDE... AND WAKANDA IS YOURS!

'SCUSE ME FOLKS, COMIN' THROUGH.

IS THAT--?

T'CHALLA, YOU ARE THE MAN...

WAITAMINUTE. IS THAT WHO I THINK IT IS?

WHAT? WHO?

HE'S, UH...WELL, HE'S KINDA THE FIRST ME.

LONG STORY.

HIS NAME IS ISAIAH BRADLEY. TO HEAR HIS STORY, SEE ***TRUTH: RED, WHITE & BLACK,*** *TRUE BELIEVER. -EDITOR*

ELSEWHERE IN THE PALACE...

SINCE MY MOTHER IS THE HIGHEST-RANKING ELDER BESIDES MYSELF, SHE WILL PERFORM THE CEREMONY.

WHATEVER MAKES YOU HAPPY, DEAR.

THIS IS *NOT* ABOUT WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY, ORORO.

AFTER I PASSED A SERIES OF INITIATIONS TO BECOME THE LEADER OF THE BLACK PANTHER CULT, THERE WAS ONE *FINAL* TEST.

MY SOUL WAS TRANSPORTED TO THE *CELESTIAL PLANE*, WHERE I CAME FACE-TO-SNOUT WITH A COSMIC ENTITY WITH THE POWER TO UTTERLY DESTROY ME.

THE *PANTHER GOD.*

BUT *I'M* NOT BECOMING A "BLACK PANTHER."

NO. BUT YOU ARE ABOUT TO BECOME MY ***BRIDE.*** YOU WILL BE JUDGED AS A SOULMATE AND AS A BEARER OF FUTURE GENERATIONS OF--

ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT WE COULD ***NOT*** GET MARRIED? THAT IF THE "PANTHER GOD" LOOKS UNFAVORABLY ON ME... THEN WHAT I FEEL FOR YOU...MEANS NOTHING?

OF COURSE NOT.

IN A WORST-CASE SCENARIO, THE PANTHER GOD COULD ***CONSUME*** YOUR ***IMMORTAL SOUL,*** BUT THAT'S PRETTY UNLIKELY.

YOU'RE NOT JOKING.

NO.

THIS RITUAL IS A ***CENTRAL TENET*** OF THE PANTHER CULT. IT IS ONE OF THE REASONS WE HAVE REMAINED STRONG OVER THE CENTURIES. WOULD YOU WANT ME TO RESIGN MY TITLE OF KING OVER THIS? DOES IT SCARE YOU?

NOTHING SCARES ME.

BUT UNDERSTAND. IF--AND I MEAN IF-- I WERE NOT TO PASS THE PANTHER GOD'S TEST, I ***WOULD*** WANT YOU TO RESIGN AND BE WITH ME.

THEN YOU AGREE TO THE RITUAL.

YOU DIDN'T ANSWER MY QUESTION.

YOU FIRST.

KNOK KNOK

WHO--?

AH. RIGHT ON TIME.

PROFESSOR XAVIER...?

SO GLAD YOU COULD COME, CHARLES.

WOULDN'T HAVE MISSED IT FOR THE WORLD, T'CHALLA.

I'LL GIVE YOU TWO A MOMENT.

YOU...

...CAN WALK?

LONG STORY.

ISN'T IT ALWAYS?

BUT LET'S TALK ABOUT *YOU.*

ORORO, I'M AS PROUD AS ANY FATHER COULD BE TODAY. YOU FINALLY HAVE THE MAN YOU LOVE. THE MAN YOU ***DESERVE.***

THIS IS A MOMENTOUS UNION...

...AND THERE'S NO ONE ELSE MORE SUITED FOR THE ROLE YOU'RE ABOUT TO PLAY.

WHAT ROLE IS ***THAT,*** PROFESSOR?

ORORO, YOU HAVE BEEN A PRINCESS, A GODDESS, AND AN X-MAN. BUT THE POSITION YOU ARE ABOUT TO ASSUME TRUMPS EVERYTHING YOU'VE DONE BEFORE. ***EVERYTHING.***

YOUR MARRIAGE TO T'CHALLA REPRESENTS THE ***HIGHEST-PROFILE*** UNION IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COEXISTENCE ON THIS PLANET.

AS OF TODAY, ORORO, YOU ARE THE MOST ***IMPORTANT*** MUTANT IN THE WORLD. AS THE QUEEN OF WAKANDA, YOU WILL BE THE ***LIVING SYMBOL*** OF HUMAN/MUTANT RELATIONS.

IT'S A ROLE YOU WERE ***BORN*** TO PLAY.

ELSEWHERE IN THE PALACE...

KING T'CHALLA IS EXPECTING YOU.

THANK YOU, I--

WHAT THE HELL?!

T'CHALLA...?

T'CHALLA...?

MEANWHILE...

DON'T GET ME WRONG, IT'S GREAT TO HAVE MY BROTHER'S SPIRIT AROUND, BUT HE WON'T SHUT UP ABOUT--

WHOA. DID YOU *FEEL* THAT?

YES. A POWERFUL PRESENCE HAS ARRIVED. THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO WILL DISCERN THE SOURCE.

WELL, IF IT AIN'T OPRAH, IT MUST BE *HIM.*

WHO'S *THAT?*

ACCORDING TO THE GUIDEBOOK HERE, IT'S *THE WATCHER.*

FRIEND OF THE BRIDE OR GROOM?

ACTUALLY, HE SHOWS UP WHEN A COSMIC EVENT IS ABOUT TO OCCUR.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? IS *GALACTUS* SHOWING UP NEXT?

WHAT DO YA THINK HE'S DOING HERE, STRETCHO?

WE CAN ONLY ASK HIM.

HE'S NOT EXACTLY A CHATTERBOX, IS HE? MORE THE STRONG SILENT TYPE.

LIKE ME... BUT NOT AS HANDSOME.

STAND DOWN. BOTH OF YOU. PLEASE.

I AM CALLING ON YOU--

--TWO OF MY OLDEST AND DEAREST FRIENDS--

--TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ***NEUTRAL GROUND*** THAT WAKANDA PROVIDES. LET THE SPIRIT OF THE DAY REKINDLE FRIENDSHIPS THAT ARE DEEPER THAN WHATEVER DIFFERENCES SEPARATE US.

I AM NOT HERE TO DEBATE POLICY. I AM HERE AS A FRIEND AND A FORMER AVENGER ASKING YOU TO CONSIDER THIS:

TOGETHER, WE HAVE DEFEATED INTERSTELLAR FOES. DON'T LET A PIECE OF PAPER BE OUR DOWNFALL.

IT'S NOT A PIECE OF PAPER WE'RE DISPUTING, PANTHER-- IT'S ***PRINCIPLE.*** PRINCIPLES OUR NATION WAS FOUNDED UPON. PRINCIPLES I'VE FOUGHT SIXTY YEARS TO DEFEND!

THIS IS ABOUT **LAW**, STEVE, PLAIN AND SIMPLE. A LAW THAT'S OUR BEST CHANCE OF **AVOIDING** ANOTHER STAMFORD.

A LAW THAT **YOU'RE** BREAKING.

REGISTRATION ***PRESUMES*** CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR.

IT'S CALLED ***PROFILING***, TONY, AND IT'S A SLIPPERY SLOPE. I WON'T HAVE ***ANY*** PART OF IT.

NO, STEVE, IT'S CALLED **REGULATION**. LIKE GUN CONTROL, THE SUPER HERO REGISTRATION ACT SERVES THE GREATER GOOD.

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ***PEOPLE'S LIVES***, TONY. BEING ***GIFTED*** ISN'T A CRIME. IT DOESN'T MAKE YOU A THREAT.

TELL THAT TO THE **PARENTS** AT STAMFORD.

T'CHALLA, PLEASE GIVE MY APOLOGIES TO ORORO. TELL HER I WANTED TO BE HERE.

CAP, WAIT...

I WISH THE TWO OF YOU HAD *TRIED* TO--

T'CHALLA, I KNOW YOUR INTENTIONS WERE PURE, BUT THIS WAS A **MISTAKE**.

I RESPECT WAKANDA'S **NEUTRALITY** IN THIS WAR. FOR THAT REASON, I'M ABIDING THE PRESENCE OF **KNOWN FUGITIVES**. BUT WHAT'S TAKING PLACE HERE TODAY...

...YOU'RE GOING TO BE NAVIGATING A **POLITICAL MINEFIELD** FOR YEARS TO COME. YOUR ENEMIES WILL SEIZE ON THE OPPORTUNITIES YOU'VE PROVIDED.

AND YOU, TONY?

ARE YOU MY *FRIEND*?

T'CHALLA, YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, WE HAVE HISTORY. BUT HEAR *ME* NOW--

DON'T MEDDLE IN *THINGS* THAT DON'T CONCERN YOU.

TONY, I'VE LISTENED TO YOU. NOW LISTEN TO *ME:*

THIS *CANCER* THAT IS EATING AWAY AT THE SOUL OF YOUR COUNTRY, IT HAS NO HOME HERE.

AM *I* CLEAR?

CRYSTAL.

GIVE MY REGARDS TO ORORO. TELL HER I'M SORRY I COULDN'T STAY.

WELL. *THAT* WENT WELL...

WAKANDA IS THE PLACE TO BE TODAY. LOOK WHO'S SHOWING UP--

BET

PRESIDENT BUSH!

FIDEL CASTRO!

NELSON MANDELA!

WHO'S THAT CHEERING FOR?

OPRAH JUST ARRIVED.

OKAY, IT'S OFFICIAL. OPRAH IS THE MOST POPULAR PERSON ON EARTH!

LET ME ESCORT YOU TO YOUR SEATS. THE CEREMONY WILL BE STARTING SOON.

CAN YOU BELIEVE WE ARE HERE IN WAKANDA! IT'S A DREAM COME TRUE!

AND LOOK AT ALL THE SHOT-CALLERS HERE FOR OUR GRANDBABY'S WEDDING!

WHY IS THE PRESIDENT HERE? YOU KNOW HE DON'T GIVE A--

HUSH! THE BLACK PANTHER IS A ***HEAD OF STATE!*** HE HAS TO INVITE EVERYONE.

IF IT WERE ***MY*** COUNTRY, I'D SAY GET ON 'FORE YOU GET SPIT ON. BUT THAT'S JUST ME.

WELL, IT'S NOT YOUR COUNTRY.

HERE YOU ARE--

--WITH THE REST OF MS. MUNROE'S FAMILY.

BEEN A LONG TIME.
YES.
WE BOTH LOST BABIES.
WE ALL HAVE CRIED ENOUGH OVER THE PAST. IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE THE FUTURE.
YES INDEED.

MEANWHILE...

C'MON. I CAN'T WAIT. I'VE *GOT* TO SEE THE DRESS.

IN DUE TIME, KITTY.

FUNNY. THIS WAS ALL I EVER WANTED SINCE I WAS A CHILD. NOW THAT IT'S HERE...I QUESTION IT. IT'S THE BIGGEST DECISION SINCE MY LEAVING FOR AMERICA WITH XAVIER.

YOU MEAN GETTING MARRIED TO THE HANDSOME, RICH, HEROIC KING YOU'VE BEEN IN LOVE WITH SINCE YOU WERE A TEENAGER?

WELL, WHEN YOU PUT IT *THAT* WAY...

OHMYGAWD. IS THAT THE DRESS?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK IF YOU DON'T PUT IT ON RIGHT NOW, *I'M* WEARING IT!

YOU'LL VISIT ALL THE TIME, RIGHT?

ARE YOU KIDDING ME? I'LL SWING BY IN THE BLACK-BIRD EVERY WEEKEND!

BUT YOU'LL COME SEE US, TOO?

IF THE U.S. WELCOMES US BACK. AT THIS RATE, I'M NOT SURE THEY WILL.

STRANGE. WHY WOULD *HE* BE HERE...?

PERHAPS HE KNOWS WAKANDANS GIVE THE BEST PARTIES!

C'MON SON, YOU HAVE TO RELAX. IT'S A BLESSED DAY. ***THAT'S*** WHY THE WATCHER IS HERE.

I ***DON'T*** THINK THAT QUALIFIES AS A REASON FOR THE WATCHER TO APPEAR.

WHY ***NOT?*** TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE ON EARTH ARE ABOUT TO FORM A ***PERFECT UNION.*** I TRULY BELIEVE THIS MARRIAGE WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.

AND DON'T EVEN GET ME STARTED ON THE CHILDREN. EVEN REED RICHARDS' KIDS WILL HAVE TO--

HEY! MAYBE ***THAT'S*** WHY HE IS HERE. WHAT HAVE YOU TWO BEEN UP TO? IS YOUR BRIDE--

NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, UNCLE.

WELL, JUST KNOW YOUR FATHER IS VERY HAPPY TODAY. I FEEL HIS PRESENCE STRONGLY.

DON'T...

LET'S DO THIS.

WHERE IS YOUR LOVELY BRIDE?

I DON'T KNOW. DID YOU SCARE HER OFF?

OH. *THERE* SHE IS.

LIEBERSTESH.

DITTO, LITTLE BUDDY.

HELLO.
HELLO.
WORRIED?
NEVER.
REMEMBER: I LOVE YOU. YOUR FAMILIES LOVE YOU. YOUR FRIENDS LOVE YOU. YOU LOVE EACH OTHER.
THAT LOVE MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH FOR EACH OTHER, FOR YOUR FAMILY, FOR YOUR COUNTRY. YOU ARE FORMING THE FOUNDATION OF A NATION, A NATION THAT WILL BE IN THE FOREFRONT OF ALL NATIONS IN TIMES TO COME. ARE YOU READY?
YES.
YOU STAND IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE ***PANTHER GOD.*** WE WILL SEE WHAT HE HAS TO SAY.

WHERE ARE WE?

THE SPIRIT WORLD.

ROOOAAAARRRRRR

THE APE GOD!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME I CAN'T--?

YOUR SPECIAL POWERS ARE WITH YOUR BODY. WE ARE JUST *ESSENCE* HERE.

WHICH MEANS?

WHICH MEANS *RUN!*

I-I NEVER KNEW, NEVER IMAGINED SUCH A PLACE LIKE THIS COULD EXIST.

DON'T GET TOO DISTRACTED. EVEN THOUGH WE DON'T SEE HIM, THE PANTHER GOD IS TRACKING US.

THANK GOODNESS! HE GOT BORED WITH US.

YES, OR--

T'CHALLA...

REMEMBER: NO FEAR.

T'CHALLA-- *WHO* IS THIS YOU BRING BEFORE ME?

MY BRIDE.

BRIDE? THIS MORTAL WHO CLAIMS DIVINITY? THE BRIDE OF A PANTHER?

DON'T HOLD HER ACCOUNTABLE FOR WHAT OTHERS CLAIM HER TO BE. I LOVE HER, AND I NEED HER TO FULFILL MY DESTINY.

STEP ASIDE.

I WILL JUDGE WHAT SHE *REALLY* IS.

ROOOOOOOAR!

SNIFF SNIFF

SUUUURP

I HAVE MADE MY JUDGMENT.

WELCOME, ORORO MUNROE.

OH!

NGGH!

BACK ALREADY?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WE'VE BEEN GONE--

FIVE SECONDS. TIME MOVES DIFFERENTLY THERE.

I PRESUME ALL WENT WELL?

IT WAS ACTUALLY... KIND OF WONDERFUL.

THE PANTHER GOD HAS BLESSED THIS COUPLE. PITY ANYONE WHO WOULD STAND IN THE PATH OF THEIR HAPPINESS.

NOW LET US CELEBRATE THEIR LOVE!

LATER...

BEST PARTY *EVER!*

WHO KNEW PRINCE WOULD PLAY A WEDDING RECEPTION?

THAT'S ODD.

WHAT?

THAT MAN... OVER THERE... HE IS MORE THAN HE APPEARS TO BE.

I'VE BEEN SPOTTED BY THE MYSTICS.

I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE.

SISTER-IN-LAW! NOW IT'S OFFICIAL!

I'LL ADMIT IT, I WAS A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT MY BROTHER MARRYING SOMEONE I DIDN'T REALLY KNOW...

...BUT YOU ARE AWESOME! THAT ENTRANCE? YOU KILLED IT!

KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED.

OVER *HERE!*

WHAT IS IT?
I DON'T KNOW.
GUY JUST KEELED OVER. STRANGEST THING.
HE'S *ABANDONED* HIS HOST. HE COULD BE *ANYWHERE.*
ANYONE.
YOU KNOW, T'CHALLA SAID WE ARE WELCOME TO STAY IN WAKANDA AS LONG AS WE WANT...
...WE COULD FORGET AMERICA AND THIS WHOLE REGISTRATION THING, JESSICA. WE COULD RAISE OUR KID HERE, WHERE NO ONE IS GONNA GIVE HER HELL ABOUT BEING BLACK, OR HAVING POWERS--
NOT JUST US. FALCON, PHOTON... WHOEVER WANTS TO BE DOWN!
OKAY, YOU'VE BEEN ON THIS "BLACK AVENGERS" THING SINCE NEW ORLEANS, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO LET IT GO.
WAITAMINUTE, ARE YOU ***SERIOUSLY*** TALKING ABOUT US ***REMAINING*** EXPATRIATES AND MOVING TO WAKANDA?
WHOA! DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE, BIG FELLA!
SPIDER-MAN.
MAN-APE.
WHOSE SIDE--BRIDE OR GROOM?

BOTH.

I CAME HERE TO WREAK REVENGE FOR NOT BEING INVITED. TO DEMAND RESPECT FOR OUR TRIBE. THEN, WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE BORDER... THEY SAID MY NAME *WAS* ON THE LIST.

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THERE *WAS* A LIST.

WHATCHA DRINKING THERE, MAN-APE?

SCOTCH.

MAYBE YOU SHOULD STOP.

Y'KNOW, IF YOU'RE HAVING RESPECT PROBLEMS, MAYBE CALLING YOURSELF "MAN-APE" AND WALKING AROUND IN A WHITE RUG IS SOMETHING YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER.

ARE YOU *DISRESPECTING* MY TRIBE?

SLOW DOWN, BIG GUY. ALL I'M SAYING IS, I KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT NAMING YOURSELF AFTER AN UNPOPULAR ANIMAL. YOU MIGHT WANT TO SWITCH IT OUT TO SOMETHING WITH MORE MAINSTREAM APPEAL--LIKE A LION OR TIGER OR SOMETHING.

YOU *ARE* DISRESPECTING THE MAN-APE!

THE MAN-APE WILL *SQUASH* YOU!

SIGH CAN'T WE GET THROUGH JUST *ONE* OF THESE THINGS WITHOUT FISTICUFFS?

ROOOARRRR!!!

UH OH. DRUNKEN BRAWL.

NOW IT'S A REAL SUPER HERO WEDDING!

NOT 'TIL SOME WRITES ON HIS FOREHEAD WITH A MAGIC MARKER.

WHAM!

A FEW HOURS LATER...

All My Love Kitty

BEYOND CORPORATION Best, Dirk!

OKAY...

YOU CAN OPEN THIS ONE.

THE SEAL OF LATVERIA. THERE IS NO NEED FOR CONCERN. EVERYTHING'S BEEN CAREFULLY SCREENED.

GREETINGS, KING T'CHALLA, QUEEN ORORO.

WHILE I DIDN'T GET AN INVITATION TO TODAY'S BLESSED EVENT, I TAKE NO OFFENSE. CONSIDERING I HAVE BEEN TRAPPED IN HELL FOR SOME TIME, IT WAS FAIR TO PRESUME I WAS UNAVAILABLE.

THIS IS NOT A THREAT, OR A TRAP, OR ANYTHING YOU MIGHT HAVE COME TO EXPECT FROM ME. QUITE THE **OPPOSITE**, IN FACT.

I AM HERE TO GIVE YOU MY HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS AND SOME HUMBLE ADVICE.

TODAY **EVERYTHING** CHANGES FOR YOU... AND FOR WAKANDA. YOUR BLESSED UNION REPRESENTS AN UNPRECEDENTED STEP WHOSE CURRENTS WILL BE FELT BY THE WORLD COMMUNITY.

TRADITIONAL GEOPOLITICAL ALLIANCES ARE SHIFTING RADICALLY. OLD FRIENDSHIPS ARE CRUMBLING. THE WORLD IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A MUCH MORE...**UNPREDICTABLE** PLACE TO LIVE.

I AM HERE TO SALUTE YOUR UNION AND URGE THAT YOU CONSIDER ONE SIMPLE **QUESTION** AS YOU LOOK TO THE FUTURE:

IF FRIENDS AREN'T WHO THEY USED TO BE...PERHAPS **ENEMIES** AREN'T EITHER?

IF YOU WOULD AT LEAST CONSIDER A CONVERSATION, IT MIGHT BE WORTH A LOT TO **BOTH** OF US. MY DOOR IS **ALWAYS** OPEN.

SO. LATVERIA FOR THE HONEYMOON?

NOT FUNNY.

NO. NONE OF IT IS.

BUT THOSE ARE TROUBLES FOR ANOTHER DAY.

NEXT:
WORLD TOUR, PART ONE:
HOLIDAY IN LATVERIA.

BRIDE OF THE PANTHER
Part 5

"HERE COME A STORM"

Reginald Hudlin, Writer

Scot Eaton, Pencils

Klaus Janson, Inks

Dean White, Colors

Kaare Andrews, Pages 21-24

VC's Randy Gentile, Letters

Frank Cho, Cover

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Axel Alonso, Editor

Joe Quesada, Editor in Chief

Dan Buckley, Publisher

Marvel would like to give special thanks to the following people for the design of Storm's wedding gown: Procter & Gamble, CBS Daytime, Alan Locher, Ellen Wheeler, Maria Aguero, Alyson Hui, and Shawn Dudley.

DIVINING THE DESIGN...

by Jim McCann

Many months ago, when we at Marvel knew the Black Panther was going to pop the question, we knew that we had our work cut out for us. I mean, this wasn't just any wedding, this would be a **royal** wedding! The guest list would need to be scrutinized, seating arrangements delicately balanced, and security tightened. After all, we are in the middle of a **Civil War**! However, before any of that could be addressed, we knew we had an even bigger challenge: we had to get a dress!

Who could be worthy of dressing one of our most revered characters? Storm is not only the most recognizable female character, but one of the most stylish and savvy women at Marvel. So, we called up our friends at CBS Daytime and the wonderful Maria Aguero had just the man for the challenge. Shawn Dudley, Costume Designer for *Guiding Light*, has designed dresses for heroes, villains, and divas, so who better to dress a mutant goddess?

So, what exactly goes into designing a dress for the Wedding of the Century? A lot, it seems. A few weeks ago, our pals at Comic Book Resources sat down with Shawn to discuss his process. At that point in time, the dress was designed and Frank Cho worked off that design to draw the cover to *Black Panther* #18. What follows is that interview.

STORM'S GUIDING LIGHT: SHAWN DUDLEY REVEALS DESIGNER SECRETS

by Arune Singh, *Staff Writer, Comic Book Resources*

It's no secret that the wedding of Storm and the Black Panther is quite unusual for Marvel Comics. Fans have debated the merits of the relationship, with some feeling each character has "better" suitors, but there's no doubt that this union is at the very least something with many storytelling possibilities. The union occurs in July's "Black Panther" #18, but Marvel and TV Guide recently unveiled the wedding dress to be worn by the famous member of the X-Men (and portrayed by Halle Berry in the films), designed by daytime drama Costume Designer Shawn Dudley. Dudley's work on CBS' "Guiding Light" has earned him many accolades, so along with Alyson Hui, his associate designer, he was happy to tackle this iconic comic book character. CBR News recently spoke with Dudley via phone at his New York offices, in between his search for the perfect outfit to compliment the popular Tom Pelphry, who plays Jonathan Randall, on "Guiding Light."

Shawn, thanks for taking the time to talk with us. So how did you get involved with the wedding of Black Panther & Storm?

The initiative started at Marvel, since they wanted to do a promotional with an outside source, to design the basic look for this wedding dress, whether it was from a top notch wedding designer like Vera Wang or whomever. Marvel eventually narrowed it down to where it was more a costume idea — they didn't want a traditional Western style wedding dress design. They had contacts at ABC and CBS, and asked costume designers to come up with initial design ideas. We seemed to have taken the design concept to where Marvel wanted it and did some in-depth research, came up with the concept, explored the traditions of this kind of wedding and voila, we got the job.

So then what inspired the look of the dress?

We had to do a lot of research because, and I'm a bit embarrassed to say this, I only knew Storm from the big splashy Hollywood movie, so I needed to get in there and find out who Storm was in her comic world. We approached design the same way we approach any design, namely to get inside the character because they have a life, and the dress needs to reflect that. We were not going to design just any dress for Storm: it had to be appropriate for her. We really had to go back and explore the different periods in her story. There's some periods with her hair pulled back, another where she came back from Japan looking very edgy and street. She tends to reflect the journey she's on. Also, this is set as a royal wedding and we wanted the dress to seem appropriately regal. We also went in and did research on different

tribal aspects and symbolism, because the writer really wanted to play up the fact that it is going to be set in Africa. Black Panther has his history with Africa and Storm has her history with Africa. We needed

to mix all of that in, along with our additional research. We also turned to various fashion designers from Thierry Mugler, Vivenne Westwood, and vintage Gianni Versace. These were fashion designers who used exaggerated lines and proportions and that unique quality that embodied what we were going for with Storm's dress. We also looked at vintage designs from Erte and the Hollywood costume designer, Adrian. We also designed a beautiful ceremonial cape that she will wear for entrance that hasn't been seen yet. The cape has a gold handpainted and beaded design using African kente cloth and mud cloth design. She makes her grand entrance and the cape is removed to show the wedding gown underneath.

In the press release, you mentioned that the comic book version of the dress differed from your actual design.

[laughs]

Could you explain the differences?

We designed something that was more in keeping with our classic design technique. We paint our renderings in watercolors and it just creates a very different feeling for the dress, as opposed to the artists rendering for the comic book. Our lines are softer, body features aren't quite as exaggerated, and it's just much more in that theatrical style rendering that we're used to. That was the hard part, wrapping our heads around the fact that this wasn't a garment to be produced into a real garment, so it wouldn't be a fully realized project, and we tried to keep in mind how the artists in the comic book world create movement and fabrics. We wanted to make sure that we gave them enough elements to get those looks. We knew she would walk, and possibly fly, and we wanted to make sure those elements were in the costume. We also tried to work in her mother's ruby, and mentioned it to the Marvel guys, but she had lost it somewhere down the road, but they were able to make it so that the ruby comes back to her. When I saw the final version, by Frank Cho, I was a little surprised [laughs] to see it and compare the two. She's much sexier and has a little more bust action going on in the comic book, and I understand it, but I can't go that far with it, because it's not my nature as a designer. It was hard to let our baby go to someone else, but I'm happy with what he did with it.

So is it safe to assume you were a fan of comics as a kid? You seem to understand the storytelling language.

Oh yeah. I was really more into those weird, kind of scary horror comics from the sixties and seventies. Those were my favorites and I had so many hand-me-downs from my uncle. They creeped me out… but I loved it. I also had some of the classic Disney comics, and kept track of Spider-Man. In New Mexico, where I used to live, the Albuquerque Journal used to run Spider-Man everyday and my grandmother would dutifully cut it out everyday and once a month I'd get a packet of comics she'd cut out for me.

Did you try to work on the film?

No, that's L.A, a whole

different world, but my dream job was *Lord of The Rings*. I almost did go for it. But I found out that they were in production in New Zealand and I would have dropped everything in my life to go work there. I'm one of those

Lord Of The Rings fanatics. I still have my original copies that I first read when I was 13.

Uh oh [laughs]

I even designed those costumes in college, when I studied design.

Did they look like the film's costumes?

They were close. There's an iconic look to many of the characters, so it's hard not to be similar.

Now we know that soap fans and comic fans are equally intense -- and equally vocal. But both mediums, for lack of a better term, are in a certain amount of decline from their glory days. Looking at both industries, how do you think they can increase viewership?

I think they can do it, but there needs to be a real understanding of the contemporary audience. The attention span is much shorter and I think that affects soaps and comics: if you've got a long running storyline, then the audience needs faster resolution and something new all the time. I don't think they're willing to invest that kind of time into the storyline. You see these younger people — I don't want to say kids, but they sort of are — are always looking forward to the next thing, from the iPod to the X-Box, it's the new generation that gets them excited. They get excited about a brand and we have to address that brand issue. I don't know as much about comics as I do about soaps, but we shy away from contemporary storytelling and we seem to sanitize certain things because we think the audience wants that…but the audience is leaving us. There's so much violence, peer pressure, status objects…all so much more apparent now. I'm generation X and I think there's a bigger generation gap than ever before, which we need to address, since people in their twenties are so much savvier than we expect. We underestimate them.

Well, we don't underestimate you — so will you be doing more comic book work?

If they ask me, I'd love to. It allows me to be creative in ways that I can't be on the show.

DESIGN IN MOTION

Once the dress had been designed and used by Frank Cho, it was time for interior artist Scot Eaton to put that design in motion. I recently sat down with Shawn once more to show him the final result: Storm's "walk" down the aisle. The moment had arrived! So, how did it all come together? Read on, True Believer!

Shawn, once again, thank you for doing this!

Not at all a problem! It's been great!

Ok, so moment of truth. Here it is, Storm in the gown, "in action" as it were. First reaction?

My first reaction was to laugh. But I laughed in a good way mostly because I was surprised to see the transformation and almost final product. I'm amazed to see this design come to life in a way that's very different than what I usually do. I usually see the design through to the end on a live person. I've been able to touch and feel and work with a costume in person. In this form we had to really suspend disbelief and visualize the design on paper and through the beautiful artwork on the page. I think it looks pretty cool.

Now that you've had a chance to see it in four-color, do you think it works the way you envisioned it?

I do think that it mostly works the way I and my assistant, Alyson, envisioned it. We knew that subtle changes would happen as the design was interpreted by each artist. I had to really sit back and force myself to not get involved. And that's really hard for me to do. Its our design, so we're a little possessive. As I look at it though, I'm very pleased with the final product.

Wonderful! I'm glad we did your design justice! You designed the cape for dramatic effect; what do you think about how it was used in the comic?

I think the cape works from what I can tell. My intention for the cape was to be a presentational moment. When Storm first appears at the wedding ceremony, we first see her in this full ceremonial cape befitting the royal aspect of the wedding. She removes it to than reveal her gown and the wedding ceremony begins. But I do love the movement in the cape and the sweep of the panels.

Aside from Storm's dress, what's your favorite costume you've ever designed?

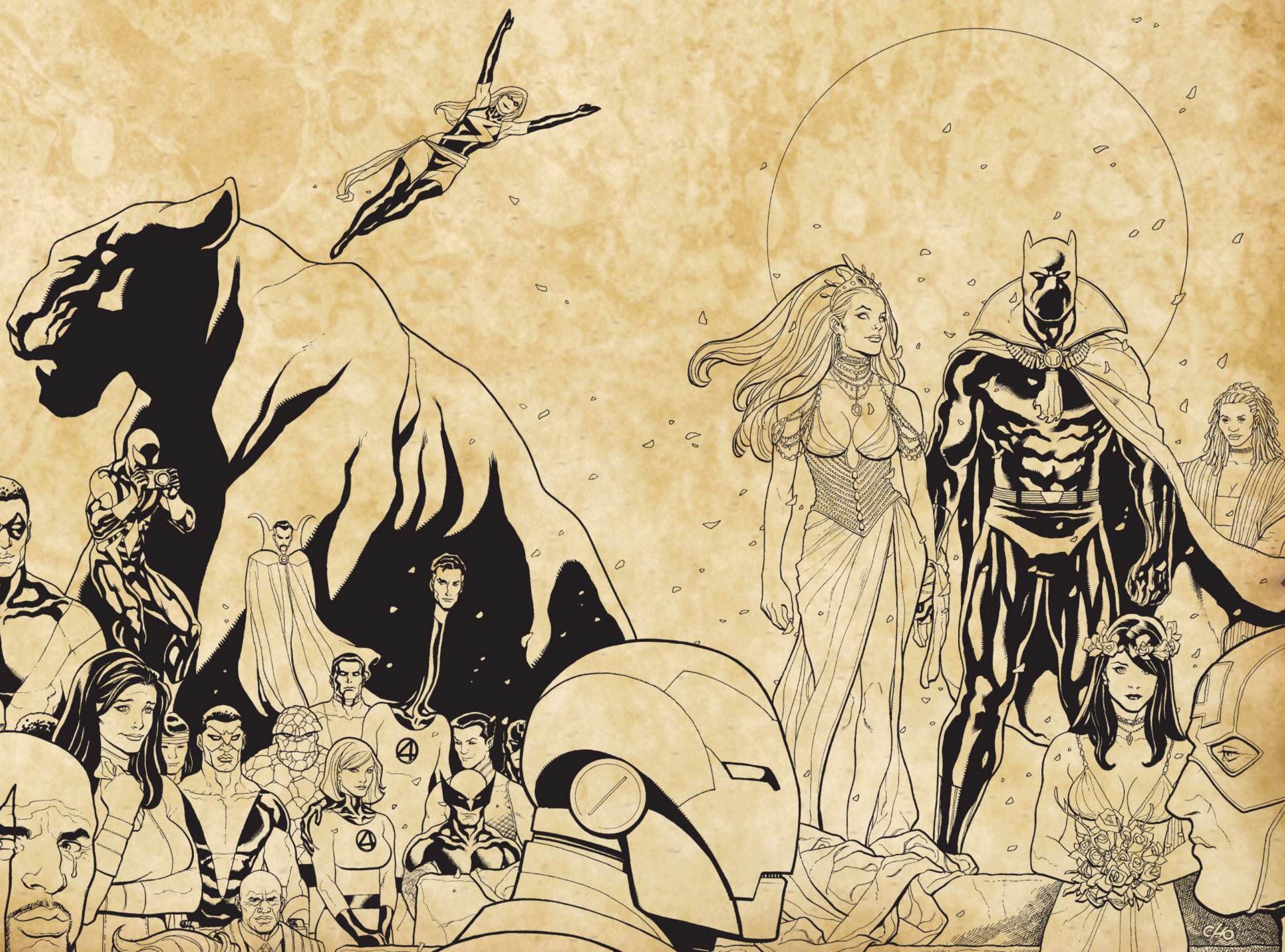
I don't know that I have one favorite costume that I've designed. I learned an interesting lesson back in the day as a theatre design student and that was we should never be fully satisfied with our designs...there's always something more that we could have done or achieved. And when that day comes when we are satisfied with our design, then that's the day it's over. As designers and artists, we should always be learning something new and striving for perfection and looking for that new way to help tell the story.

Great advice! Any final thoughts?

Final thoughts? Yes...I'm just glad to have had the chance to collaborate on a very unique and challenging project. The type of project that really pushes us to think outside the box.

Well, we are thankful for the time and energy! Here's hoping we get to work together again soon!

So, there you have it. From concept to design to wedding day--everything it takes to dress a goddess! As you can tell, it's quite an undertaking! Here's hoping this is the last wedding for a while. Wait, I'm getting a call... What's that? WHO is having a baby? Wow! The fans are going to be shocked! Ok, thanks for the heads up. Hmmm... I wonder if Shawn can design baby clothes...



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